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INTO THE

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OF

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CRITICAL ENQUIRY

INTO THE

Moral Writings

OF

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON.

IN WHICH

THE TENDENCY

OF

CERTAIN PASSAGES IN THE RAMBLER,

AND

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

OF

THAT CELEBRATED WRITER,

IS IMPARTIALLY CONSIDERED.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

AN APPENDIX.

CONTAINING

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN *BOSWELL* AND *JOHNSON*

IN THE SHADES.

By ATTALUS.

London:

PRINTED BY C. CORRALL, 38, CHARING CROSS.

SOLD BY MESSRS. COBBETT AND MORGAN, PALL MALL, AND R. FAULDER, BOOKSELLER TO THE KING, NEW BOND STREET.

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PREFACE.

OF a work like the present it seems incumbent upon me to offer a few prefatory remarks. Something, it may be necessary to say, in extenuation of an attempt, which will, I doubt not, be considered by many as, at once, daring, and unnecessary. To deprecate the severity of criticism by an avowal of my motives, may not be unproductive of the desired effect; and, if I succeed in impressing *that* conviction, the following sheets may be read by the warmest admirer of the author here controverted. But to those, who

" Ne'er advance a judgment of their own,
" But catch the spreading notion of the town."

I am

I am fully aware all endeavours to that purpose will be nugatory; and respecting the opinions of such, I feel myself perfectly at ease. It is from the tribunal of just, and rational criticism that I await my sentence; from men who, in the execution of their high office, can lull their strongest prejudices to sleep, and pass a dispassionate verdict on the productions of contemporary authors; to them, to the RESPECTABLE BODY OF REVIEWERS, and to the ENLIGHTENED OF MY COUNTRYMEN, I submit this first production of an early mind.

When I first perused the nervous writings of Dr. Johnson, I was enraptured; was enthusiastic in my admiration; I bowed implicit confidence to their VERACITY. Pleasure so unabated called for a renewal, and I flew with eagerness to the volumes, which contained such treasures; but the first delirium of admiration had subsided, and the solid powers

of

of understanding resumed their sway. I saw less to admire, and something to censure; the mass was impressed upon my heart; and I bore about me intellectual scenes of existence, which I panted to realize. Suspence, when attached to events of importance, is a state of existence the most dreadful human nature can sustain; to shake it off, to arrive at certainty, are endeavours coincident with it. To substantiate then the facts existing in my mind was my ceaseless exertions. Day followed day; events succeeded events; man still acted on the busy theatre of the world; and characters of importance still continued to attract public attention; but amid all this vortex of bustle and confusion, amid this continually varied scene of human existence, I found nothing analagous to the dogmas of Johnson; I found nothing consentaneous to *his* pictures of life. Yet a consciousness of the fallibility of man,

would

would not suffer me to form ultimate or hasty conclusions; I was more willing to suspect myself of weakness, than Dr. Johnson of error. What then was to be done? I read his works again, and again; In vain I sought to assimilate them within the utmost verge of existing realities; the task was fruitless!—THEY WERE FALSE!

The ruling principle of my life has ever been the immediate, or ultimate benefit of society. Regarding myself as a being, placed in this nether world, as a part of a vast and unlimited connexion, and responsible for the use of those faculties whatever they may be, bestowed upon me by the Great Creator, I reflected upon the probable good likely to result to that society, from the general writings of Johnson. I saw them replete with the most dangerous consequences; to *me* they appeared so; and to me they *still* appear so. I perceived them calculated from their wide dissemination, from the

the unvaried strain of gloomy speculation which pervades them, and from the falseness of their delineations, to precipitate mankind into a chain of reasoning, destructive of all confidence between man and man, and subversive of all the social affections. Such was the aspect they wore to *me*; under such convictions did I compose the following pages; and with such convictions, do I now deliver them to the public. If in forming this opinion I have erred, it is an inevitable consequence that the greater part of the following ratiocinations must be wrong; for in that case they flow from a contaminated source; and should such be the case, no gratification to me could be greater, than to have the fountain head purified by a calm and candid demonstration of my error. But if happily I have succeeded in discovering a rock hitherto involved amid clouds, whose splendour dazzled the eyes of those who approached it, I shall consider

sider as the most beneficial epoch of my life, that moment when I first became acquainted with the writings of Johnson.

Thus much respecting the *motives* which produced the subsequent critique. They will, I trust, be sufficient to exonerate me from all aspersions of malevolence to the character, or injury to the fame, of the deservedly admired author here controverted. Those who are disposed to a perusal of my remarks, will find I have been in no instance sparing of commendation where there have offered occasions for it. To praise is by far the most pleasing part of criticism; but to praise in opposition to truth, is at once venal and injurious. No liberal mind can possibly be disgusted with censure which reason demonstrates to be just; and authors whose irascibility is excited by all that wears the appearance of *finding fault*, should constantly remind and impress themselves with the truth, that

"Praise undeserved is scandle in disguise."*

POPE.

By this criterion, however apparently severe, I am willing the merits or demerits of the following pages should be estimated, but at the same time I humbly hope and pray with all the solicitude of a delinquent, that my judges (for I believe they employ no jury) will pass a merciful verdict.

* Again in one of his letters to Wycherley, our poet thus expresses himself:

"Praise to a youug wit is like rain to a tender flower; if it be moderately bestowed, it cheers and revives; but if too lavishly, overcharges and depresses."

Pope's Letters, edit. 1737. p. 11.

The justness of this remark none can, I believe, deny; or at least none who would be thought consistent with reason and the very nature of things. Judicious and *limited* commendation may further be compared to the sun in its relation to the natural world. It ripens the crude seeds of genius, and shelters its blossoms; those blossoms which severe criticism would have blasted in the first opening. Here I would not be understood to contradict the observations made in the text; for in the present instance I allude only to the *extreme severity* with which the works of young authors are often considered; a practice certainly iujurious to the interests of literature; for it may often damp the rising ardour which would one day have shed a lusture on the republic which future ages might admire. For the salutary and manly use of just censure and disinterested criticism I must ever profess myself a warm advocate, and more particularly when it is employed on works calculated to injure the broad basis of society and domestic bliss — RELIGION. But while on this topic I shall presume upon the indulgence of my reader by introducing one more short quotation from the profound and philosophic Hume. "A

" A writer is animated with new force when he hears the applauses of the world for his former productions, and being roused by such a motive, he often reaches a pitch of perfection equally surprising to himself and to his readers.—— Were Moliere and Corneille to bring upon the stage at present their early productions, which were formerly so well received, it would discourage the young poets to see the indifference and disdain of the public. The ignorance of the age alone could have given admission to the *Prince of Tyre*; but it is to that we owe the *Moor*. Had *Every Man in his Humour* been rejected, we had never seen *Volpone*."—Essays. vol. 1. page 223.

A

CRITICAL ENQUIRY,

&c. &c. &c.

THE writings of Johnson have been an endless source of enquiry and debate. Volumes have been written to prove what was never yet doubted; and biographers have exhausted every incident of his life to eke out their languid narrations. Minute and insipid enquiry have supplanted just and rational investigation: childish and impertinent tales have been obtruded upon the public: the felling of Osborne is still related with wonder; and, we are told, with extacy, of his magnanimous letter to the translator of Ossian.*

A free

* It is surprizing to see the avidity with which these tales are related to the public. It must be confessed the remembrance of them can add little to the veneration, which the reader of Johnson might feel for his character. His letter to Mc Pherson is a specimen of the most unpolished and ungentlemanly conduct, that it is easy to conceive; and his behaviour to Osborne was that of a sullen barbarian, who returns blows for words.

A free and candid enquiry into his literary character still remains in some measure open. It still remains to consider the nature and tendency of his writings; as ethical how far adapted to common life and domestic purposes; how far they may be considered as just; and where they exhibit marks of prejudice and misanthropy.* It still remains undecided how far our language is indebted to him for its present elegance, perspicuity, and energy; or to what degree of refinement he has advanced it. These are topics which have hitherto been neglected, or at least but faintly discussed, though of acknowledged importance. But they would require the hand of a master; and the following observations will be confined to a few strictures on his moral writings, with, perhaps, some occasional remarks on the preceding hints.

Before the appearance of Johnson's Rambler the public was possessed of many diurnal papers. The Tatler, the Guardian,

* This enquiry has been in some measure pursued by Dr. Towers, in an ingenious work of his, entitled "An Essay on the life, character, and writings of Dr. Samuel Johnson, 1786."

Guardian, the Spectator, and, many others, had embraced the arduous project of instructing their countrymen, and laboured to extirpate the vices and immorality then existing. To this effect they thought ridicule the most powerful weapon; and employed it sometimes with dexterity, and sometimes with propriety: every foible was exposed, and every vice abhorred; but descending too much to the minute fopperies of giddy fashion, and prescribing rules for the adjustment of female dress, their writings were sought after rather as a recreation from satiety and listlessness, than as a manual of truth and morality.

This great defect Johnson was aware of; ambitious of distinction, his gigantic mind was upon the wing for every avenue which might lead to it; and it was doubtless a ready suggestion, that a pure body of ethics was still wanting; and, (perhaps, conscious of his own capability) he determined to commence the difficult employment. Having read much, and possessing a retentive memory, he found his mind stored with abundance of matter;

ter; Classical allusions were ready at his command, and a peculiar felicity of combination; an accurate observer of nature, he readily bared the human breast to his inspection, and detected, with uncommon penetration, the multifarious involutions of human passion. Thus qualified for the attempt, he published his first Rambler, March 20, 1750.

To consider every paper individually, would be a tedious and unprofitable task. Their ultimate tendency and probable effect is the thing to be discussed, and this requires to be done with as much precision, brevity and perspicuity, as possible. How far I may attain to this, is properly the decision of my readers.

Johnson naturally possessed a misanthropic way of thinking; and this had probably been greatly confirmed by the numerous disappointments of his early life. A slave, likewise, to the most absurd prejudices,* which he could never overcome, for he too much indulged them, his

* Was it not an astonishing weakness of mind, or a childish prejudice, which induced the Author to compose and address a short prayer to the Deity, on the commencement of his Rambler?

his judgment was often perverted: and he may be suspected of sometimes, endeavouring to give dignity to trifles, of which he was conscious, and of persisting in error rather than retract what he had once advanced. His misanthropy and prejudice are eminently manifest in his Rambler.

The great design of this work was to instruct mankind; to teach the happiness of virtue and religion; to display the horrors of vice and impiety; to inculcate a proper subordination of the passions; and to arm the mind against the vicissitudes of life. A more noble and exalted undertaking could not employ the mind of man. But to produce the proposed effect, much was required, and much, which Johnson never could attain; he taught the happiness of virtue, and displayed the miseries of vice with peculiar energy; here his whole soul was employed, and he felt the indignation he expressed; but when he would support

Rambler? And how shall we account for the serious concern which he expressed at having put some milk into his tea on a Good Friday, but from the prevalence of obstinate bigotry or foolish prepossessions?

port us against the contingencies of existence, his mind becomes darkened by intervening clouds of prejudice, and his arguments degenerate into sophistical declamation. Yet, in his own words, "to have attempted much is always laudable even when the enterprise is above the strength that undertakes it; to rest below his aim is incident to every one whose fancy is active, and whose views are comprehensive."

Life, in its very sunshine, is perhaps sufficiently beset with evil; and we need not Monitors to tell us, at every step, that destruction may be the consequence. This is perpetually awakening the mind to a bitter consciousness of its situation, and barring every access to genuine pleasure, even when pursued with the most unerring virtue. The motive is unquestionably just: a desire to guard unthinking youth from the precipices which surround them, and to impress upon their hearts the conviction, that a life of heedless security is a life of guilt and misery. But this end will rarely be attained if thus sought; a perpetual alarm

of

of probable dangers and miscarriages soon loses its effect; human judgment is not infallible; we may expect to err more frequently than to be right, and our prophecies will often be found to be erroneous. This influences the mind, and not unfrequently engenders a sceptical habit, which directly discredits every thing, on the pretence that some are false.

A young mind rising from a perusal of the Rambler would conceive the most melancholy ideas of human nature and human events. Mankind would appear to him as an undistinguished mass of fraud, perfidy, and deceit; oppressing the humble, exalting the base, and levelling the virtuous; awarding its suffrages and honours to the unworthy and degenerate, and turning, with disgust, from the manly struggles of the truly wise and worthy. Life would appear to him as one incessant warfare with envy, malevolence, and falshood; as the precarious tenure of a minute, never free from open assault or secret undermining; as beset on every side with misery,

with

with want, with disease; as a road for ever obstructed by the pitfalls of infamy and remorse, and into which every step may plunge us; he will, I say, conceive this life to be a monstrous association of all possible evils, and unattended with any alleviation but religion, and unvisited by any hope but that of futurity and a MERCIFUL CREATOR.

The utility of Dr. Johnson's Rambler as a moral work may be justly questioned. Every thing which tends to obstruct the activity of man, and to crush well-founded hopes on this life, severely, merits reprehension. The circle of our pleasures is sufficiently contracted, and our truest happiness can be derived only from the present moment; the past and future being objects either of regret or desire. To restrict them still more is of no avail, whether the end proposed be the advancement either of religion or morality; but it may be the cause of infinite injury. The gloomy representations of life as exhibited by Johnson, have this direct and only tendency, to repress the arm of industry, to check

check the vigour of enterprize, to suppress rational wishes, to fill the mind with a hateful distrust of society, and to foster the most pernicious prejudices. They are also capable of repressing other generous sentiments of the mind which form the most important links of human connection. In short, the papers of the Rambler which relate to life, are in his own words, fit only " to disturb the happiness of others, to lessen the little comforts, and shorten the short pleasures of our condition, by painful remembrances of the past, or melancholy prognostics of the future; their only *aim* is to crush the rising hope, to damp the kindling transport, and alloy the golden hours of gaiety with the hateful dross of grief and suspicion."

This might be exemplified by a multiplicity of quotations, were they necessary. But a few only shall here be employed; namely, such opinions as are delivered as axioms, and stand in general divested of all demonstrative support or collateral argument, and sometimes entire delineations.—These will better display

play the decided bias of Johnson's mind; and consequently, the propriety of admitting him as an unerring guide, or as a safe and judicious moralist. And should he be found sometimes incompetent to that task, it will in no manner detract from his literary character, nor render our admiration of his sublime and stupendous genius less fervid. It will only demonstrate, that a man, whose perceptions have been clouded by poverty, whose mind has been harrassed by complicated miseries, and whose body has been debilitated by disease, so as to impart a settled principle, drawn from the misfortunes of existence, is as incapable of exhibiting a just delineation of life, as a man would be of determining the different shades of colour, whose visual powers were obstructed by that "*drop serene*" which our immortal Milton has bewailed.

Let us suppose a Student, having toiled through the volumes of antiquity, and enlarged his intellect by views of nature, becomes ambitious of disclosing to the world the result of his laborious studies. Conscious of superior acquirements, and desirous

desirous of elucidating some learned perplexity, or of exhorting to some important virtue, he is anxious of knowing to *whom* he confides his knowledge, or for whose moral advancement he subjects himself voluntarily to the task of reformation.—Let us suppose this information sought in Johnson.

" He that endeavours after fame by writing, solicits the regard of a multitude, fluctuating in measures, or immersed in business, without time for intellectual improvements, he appeals to judges prepossessed by passion, or corrupted by prejudices, which preclude their approbation of any new performance. Some are too indolent to read any thing till its reputation is established; others too envious to promote that fame which gives them pain by its increase. What is new is opposed, because most are unwilling to be taught, and what is known is rejected because it is not sufficiently considered that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed. The learned are afraid to declare their opinion early, lest they should put their reputation

tion in hazard; the ignorant always imagine themſelves giving some proof of delicacy, when they refuse to be pleased; and he that finds his way to reputation through all these obstructions, must acknowledge that he is indebted to other causes besides his industry, his learning, or his wit."(—No. 2)*

What a solemn interdiction is this of all literary enterprize, and how pompously are probable miscarriages enumerated. Here, the juvenile mind would feel persuaded, that to cultivate intellect, is to incur all the miseries of want, dependance, and neglect. Does this arise from his own early failures in the career of literature? How unfit is such a moralist to form the early thought, or teach the road that leads to fame and happiness!

The

* It is a remarkable fact that this author was for ever anxious to dissuade the rising generation from cultivating knowledge. To repress this noble ardor and resplendent ambition, he sought for every argument that could be drawn from the wretchedness of life. He admitted no medium, nor would he allow any variation. He who commenced author *must positively* endure all that can embitter our existence, and make us execrate the society in which we exist. To expose the glaring fallacy of such reasoning, would be too gross an insult to the understanding of my readers.

The miseries of learning again come under his consideration, (No. 16.) and he draws with gloomy colours, the wretchedness of literary eminence, as exemplified in the history of Misellus. Dr. Johnson delighted to revel in the evils of existence, and to pourtray with all the energy of language and force of sentiment as *inevitable*, the uncertain anxieties and troubles to which we are obnoxious. Melancholy reflections from early indulgence had become habitual, and he beheld every enterprize and pursuit of life, through the mist of tears and remorse. This, though it gives an awful dignity to his writings, renders them less faithful delineations. What he had himself felt, he considered as unavoidable; and his prejudices would not suffer him to discard an opinion he had once assimilated to his mind.

The following quotation may be introduced without any comment; simply observing, that it is somewhat too definitive, as, indeed, many other of Dr. Johnson's positions are:

"The cure for the greatest part of human miseries is not radical but palliative.

liative. Infelicity is involved in corporeal nature, and interwoven with our being; all attempts, therefore, to decline it wholly are useless and vain: the armies of pain send their arrows against us on every side; the choice is only between those which are more or less sharp, or tinged with poison of greater or less malignity; and the strongest armour which reason can supply will only blunt their points, but cannot repel them."—(No. 32.)

To delight in exhibiting scenes of infelicity is a solitary and unenviable gratification. To labour to persuade mankind that all those by whom they are surrounded are actuated by avarice and sensuality; that they only wait the happy moment to ruin and overwhelm with infamy; that they caress and proffer only to deceive; and that they are slaves to the most venal passions, and incapable of any generous sentiment or atachment, is surely as reprehensible as the man who would falsely persuade you that your dearest friend wears a dagger for your destruction. All truth is valuable; and all moral truth inestimably so. Wit, genius, and

and learning, if employed on the side of falsehood, are to be regarded as weapons turned against the bosom and interest of human nature. General conclusions are at all times liable to error; but when drawn from human actions, passions, or events, must inevitably be false. Even in the attainment of one peculiar object, every man will, perhaps, employ different means; and where such dissension exists, who can assure themselves that events will be uniform?

Dr. Johnson has laboured to demonstrate in the history of Almamoulin, the son of Nouradin, that riches are incapable of affording to their possessor any other gratifications than those of the mind. If they are employed to purchase magnificent buildings; to procure varieties of food or amusements; to open prospects, or to roll rivers through new channels, they produce only satiety and listlessness, and disgust: If they attract friends, or are dispensed so as to command gratitude, they find only fraud and deceit. In short, if they are applied to any other purpose than that of solely relieving

relieving the distressed, protecting the fatherless, clothing the naked, and sheltering the defenceless widow, they only retort upon their possessor the bitterness of contempt, and the anguish of remorse.

Almamoulin is young and wealthy. His father's death makes him master of immense possessions. He showers down silver on the populace. Nobles, sages, and heroes, are combined against him, and he appeases them with gold, gems, and supplication. He solicits princesses in marriage, but trembles in the presence of one who vouchsafes him an audience. He contracts his pleasures, but is soon invaded by languor and weariness; all novelties are soon exhausted, and he finds his heart vacant. He then determines to open his doors to all the votaries of idleness and pleasure. His house rings with merriment, and festivity and revelry mark the beginning and conclusion of each day. In the fulness of his heart, he exclaims—"I have at last found the use of riches; I am surrounded by companions, who view my greatness without envy; and I enjoy at once the raptures of

of popularity and the safety of an obscure station. What trouble can he feel whom all are studious to please, that they may be repaid with pleasure? What danger can he dread to whom every man is a friend?" Thus did Almamoulin exclaim to himself: but in the midst of his joy, a legal citation summons him before the Emperor. He is amazed and confounded, when he discovers that one whom he regarded as his friend, had accused him of treason, with the hopes of enjoying his confiscation. He, however, clears himself, and is dismissed with honour, while his accuser perishes in prison.

Almamoulin, now convinced of the perfidy of man, and how little is to be expected from the most apparent virtue, retires with disgust, and has recourse to a sage on the banks of the Oxus, who thus harangues him:

"Brother," said the philosopher, "thou hast suffered thy reasosn to be deluded by idle hopes and fallacious appearances. Having long looked with desire upon riches, thou hadst taught thyself to think

them more valuable than nature designed them, and to expect from them, what experience has now taught thee that they cannot give. That they do not confer wisdom, thou may'st be convinced, by considering at how dear a price they tempted thee, upon thy first entrance into the world, to purchase the empty sound of vulgar acclamation; that they cannot bestow fortitude or magnanimity that man may be certain who ſtood trembling at Astracán, before a being not naturally superior to himself; that they will not supply unexhausted pleasure, the recollection of forsaken palaces and neglected gardens, will easily inform thee; that they rarely purchase friends, thou didst soon discover, when thou wert left to stand thy trial uncountenanced and alone; yet think not riches useless; there are purposes to which a wise man may be delighted to apply them: they may, by a rational distribution to those who want them, ease the pains of helpless disease, still the throbs of restless anxiety, relieve innocence from oppression, and raise imbecility to cheerfulness and vigour.

This

This they will enable thee to perform, and this will afford the only happiness ordained for our present state, the confidence of Divine favour, and the hope of future rewards."

These arguments are specious, and are, besides, drawn from the narrative, which is purely ideal. They cannot be said to be just, if considered with regard to the world, though they are, perhaps, amusing as an Eastern fiction. But the moral which Dr. Johnson intended to convey, is sufficiently obvious; and they are therefore to be considered in their proper light. Our affections are generally proportioned to our real or supposed relative connections. The defeat of armies, the subversion of states, or the machinations of conspirators happening in distant countries raise few emotions in the mind of an Engliſhman, conscious that they can in no manner affect him. In the same manner, the wealth of Almamoulin appears altogether chimerical to the reader; and, incapable of recalling to his memory any parallel event in his sphere of action, he reads it as a tale which soon

dies

dies away; and he is in no way concerned lest the same causes should produce in him similar consequences. Hence the arguments lose their force which was purely relative, and are forgotten, together with the narrative which produced them. Nor are they cogent, if considered distinctly.—Riches are certainly a means of happiness; and the mind may receive a gratification equally solid, though not so lasting, in erecting edifices, and forming gardens, as in dispensing benefactions to the needy and distressed. For even here, to a virtuous mind, the consideration will arise, that he thus employs a certain number of individuals in honest industry; and, by an equitable reward for their labour, enables them to enjoy, at least, the blessings of life; a consciousness which must impart ineffable delight. Nor will such a distribution prevent the exercise of charity. But Johnson is uniform in his attacks on elegance and splendour, and always with acrimony. For this prejudice, it were, perhaps, vain to enquire the cause; but it may be said in extenuation, that he

possessed

possessed it in common with other severe moralists, who had preceded him. All have affected to despise what they could not obtain, and have vainly endeavoured to persuade mankind, that wealth, unless directed in one particular channel, is productive only of evil and mischance. But this position they have very wisely rejected, and have always been willing rather to endure the ills of opulence, whatever they might be, than "*fly to others which they knew not of.*"

Passing over a multitude of gloomy speculations which every where preponderate, we at length find our author again painting, in solemn colours, the miseries of authorship. Indeed this subject he never treats but with the most melancholy prognostics, and earnest dissuasion from the pursuit. Being himself an author, it may be supposed he knew something of its inconveniences; but if it was really attended with such immense difficulties and obstructions as he describes, why, it may be asked, did he not abandon it, and adopt some other mode of life, less exposed to mischance, and

productive of greater happiness? I believe it will not be easy to exemplify (except in some few instances) the morose and prejudiced descriptions of Dr. Johnson; and he himself could not but be conscious of their fallacy. Nay, I am persuaded, that many of these complaints are to be regarded only as the bursts of pride, and the affected mimicry of distresses which were never felt. While he pompously displayed the pretended obstructions in the paths of learning, he, at the same time, gratified his own vanity, by manifesting that he had overcome them, either by his perseverance, his genius, or his abilities. And yet how industriously he would intimidate others from entering the same path, may be seen from the following quotations:

* * * * * * * * * * * "The first apperance of excellence unites multitudes againſt it, unexpected opposition rises up on every ſide; the celebrated and the obscure join in the confederacy, subtilty furnishes arms to impudence, and invention leads on credulity.

"The hazards of those that aspire to eminence,

eminence, would be much diminished if they had none but acknowledged rivals to encounter. Their enemies would then be few, and what is yet of greater importance, would be known. But what caution is sufficient to ward off the blows of invisible assailants, or what force can stand against unintermitted attacks, and a continual succession of enemies? Yet such is the state of the world, that no sooner can any man emerge from the crowd, and fix the eyes of the public upon him, than he stands as a mark to the arrows of lurking calumny, and receives in the tumult of hostility, from distant and from nameless hands, wounds not always easy to be cured.

" When any man has endeavoured to deserve distinction, he will be surprised to hear himself censured where he would not expect to have been named; he will find the utmost acrimony of malice among those whom he never could have offended. Nothing is too gross, or too refined, too cruel, or too trifling to be practised; very little regard is had to the rules of honourable hostility, but every weapon

is

is accounted lawful, and those that cannot make a thrust at life, are content to keep themselves in play with petty malevolence to tease with feeble blows and impotent disturbance."—(No. 144.)

What a depraved picture is this of human nature! In what a world of guilt and infamy do we exist! Where shall we seek for friendship where all are false; where shall we repose our griefs where none are virtuous? Alas! How may the most exalted intellect be corrupted by a pernicious indulgence of rancorous prejudices?

Where is the youth that, captivated by Johnsonian eloquence, and impressed with the conviction of those scenes he beholds so glowingly depicted, would not resolve within himself to treat mankind as a band of robbers, or of mercenaries; as a society of fawning, cringing, false and malevolent wretches; as a set of beings devoid of principle, of humanity, or of justice; bounteous only to deceive; and humble only to destroy; affecting virtues which they do not possess, and perpetrating crimes which they pretend

to

to abhor. Would he not become a misanthrope to avoid the infection, or plunge in guilt to render himself a fit companion. Is this a moralist to be trusted, or ought we, as rational beings, to confide ourselves to the direction of that man, who consults his own mind, which is darkened by obstinate prepossessions, rather than the book of nature, which is open to every eye; or the volume of truth, which is never inscrutable to those who industirously seek it?

In the same manner, it may be asked, whether a Student, charmed with the eloquence and misled by the assertions of Johnson, would not, with disgust, abandon his studies, and lament, in the secret confidence of his own heart, the gross barbarity, and the diabolical machinations of his depraved countrymen. Confident of the certain consequence of all his endeavours to improve, instruct, or to amuse mankind, he would remain in painful inactivity, and feel no desire to rouse his mind from its lethargy. Ease is always preferable to pain; and the impulse must indeed be very great, which would

would induce a man to forfeit the quiet indolence of obscurity, only to endure all the attacks of the *fury passions*, excited by his endeavours to promote virtue, or improve knowledge.* And these are the fatal events to be apprehended, as Dr. Johnson would persuade us; but happily his admonitions, or his prognostics, have been little regarded, as we still possess our Poets, our Historians, and our Critics; so certain it is that all writings are valuable only in proportion as they are true, and that in the same proportion will they ever affect the mind.

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* It is hardly reasonable to suppose that a man impressed with the conviction of the certain and absolute inefficacy of all his endeavours to meliorate, or improve the condition of human nature, would pursue those endeavours with ardor, or would pursue them at all. Upon the supposition that every author writes to be believed, it is manifest that Dr. Johnson may, from the obvious nature of his compositions, produce infinite evil in society, and plunge the youthful mind in a state of the most hateful suspicion with regard to his fellow creatures. The invariable gloominess of this author, and his perverse descriptions of human nature rendered his essays so disgusting to the late Lord Orford, that he could never bear to read them, but concluded from their very nature that Johnson must have had a bad heart. The truth of this assertion I will not venture to discuss, but I fear his feelings could not on many occasions have been the most enviable.

It would be endless to select every passage or paper which treats of life and its events in the same strain of dolorous declamation. Yet I will present my reader with a few more, and passing all others till we arrive at the history of Abouzaid, the son of Morad, which is, indeed, rather too much an echo of Almamoulin. Here the perfidy of friends, the inefficacy of benevolence, and the baseness of acquaintances, are the subjects of his descriptions. But here I shall transcribe the author's own words.

" Morad lived many years in prosperity; every day encreased his wealth, and extended his influence. The Sages repeated his maxims, the Captains of thousands waited his commands.—Competion withdrew into the cavern of Envy, and Discontent trembled at her own murmurs. But human greatness is short and transitory as the odour of incense in the fire. The sun grew weary of gilding the palaces of Morad, the clouds of sorrow gathered round his head, and the tempest of hatred roared about his dwelling.

" Morad

" Morad saw ruin hastily approaching. The first that forsook him were his Poets; their example was followed by all those whom he had rewarded for contributing to his pleasure, and only a few whose virtue had entitled them to favour were now to be seen in his hall or chambers. He felt his danger and prostrated himself at the foot of the throne. His accusers were confident and loud; his friends stood contented with frigid neutrality; and the voice of truth was overborne by clamour. He was divested of his power, deprived of acquisitions, and condemned to pass the rest of his life on his hereditary estate.

" Morad had been so long accustomed to crowds and business, supplicants and flattery, that he knew not how to fill up his hours in solitude; he saw with regret the sun rise to force on his eye a new day, for which he had no use, and envied the savage that wanders in the desert, because he has no time vacant from the calls of nature, but is always chasing his prey, or sleeping in his den.

" His discontent in time vitiated his constitution, and a slow disease seized upon

upon him. He refused physic, neglected exercise, and lay down on his couch peevish and restless, rather afraid to die than desirous to live. His domestics, for a time redoubled their assiduities; but finding that no officiousness could soothe, nor exactnes satisfy, they soon gave way to negligence and sloth, and he that once commanded nations, often languished in his chamber without an attendant.

" In this melancholy state he commanded messengers to recal his eldest son, Abouzaid, from the Army. Abouzaid was alarmed at the account of his father's sickness, and hasted by long journeys to his place of residence. Morad was yet living, and felt his strength return at the embraces of his son; then commanding him to sit down at his bedside, ' Abouzaid,' says he, ' thy father has no more to hope or fear from the inhabitants of the earth, the cold hand of the angel of death is now upon him, and the voracious grave is howling for his prey. Hear, therefore, the precepts of ancient experience, let not my last instructions issue forth in vain. Thou

hast seen me happy, and calamitous; thou hast beheld my exaltation and my fall. My power is in the hands of my enemies; my treasures have rewarded my accusers; but my inheritance, the clemency of the Emperor has spared, and my wisdom his anger could not take away. Cast thine eyes round thee, whatever thou beholdest, will in a few hours be thine: apply thine ear to my dictates, and these possessions will promote thy happiness: aspire not to public honours, enter not the palaces of kings; thy wealth will set thee above insult; let thy moderation keep thee below envy. Content thyself with private dignity, diffuse thy riches among thy friends; let every day extend thy beneficence, and suffer not thy heart to be at rest, till thou art loved by all to whom thou art known. In the height of my power, I said to defamation, Who will hear thee? and to artifice, What canst thou perform? But, my son, despise not thou the malace of the weakest, remember that venom supplies the want of strength, and that the lion may perish by the puncture of an asp.

" Morad

" Morad expired in a few hours. Abouzaid, after the months of mourning, determined to regulate his conduct by his father's precepts, and cultivate the love of mankind, by every kindness and endearment. He wisely considered that domestic happiness was first to be secured, and that none have so much power of doing hurt, or good, as those who are present in the hour of negligence, hear the bursts of thoughtless merriment, and observe the starts of unguarded passion. He therefore augmented the pay of all his attendants, and requited every exertion of uncommon diligence, by supernumerary gratuities. While he congratulated himself upon the fidelity and affection of his family, he was in the night alarmed with robbers, who being pursued and taken, declared that they had been admitted by one of his servants; the servant immediately confessed that he unbarred the door, because another not more worthy of confidence, was entrusted with the keys.

" Abouzaid was thus convinced that a dependant could not easily be made a friend,

friend, and that while many were soliciting for the first rank of favour, all those would be alienated whom he disappointed. He therefore resolved to associate with a few equal companions, selected from among the chief men of the province. With these he lived happily for a time, till familiarity set them free from restraint, and every man thought himself at liberty to indulge his own caprice, and advance his own opinions. They then disturbed each other with contrariety of inclinations and difference of sentiments, and Abouzaid was necessitated to offend one party by concurrence, or both by indifference.

" He afterwards determined to avoid a close union with beings so discordant in their nature, and to diffuse himself in a larger circle. He practised the smile of universal courtesy, and invited all to his table, but admitted none to his retirements. Many who had been rejected in his choice of friendship, now refused to accept his acquaintance; and of those whom plenty and magnificence drew to his table, every one pressed forward toward

ward intimacy, thought himself overlooked in the crowd, and murmured because he was not distinguished above the rest. By degrees all made advances, and all resented repulse. The table was then covered with delicacies in vain; the music sounded in empty rooms, and Abouzaid was left to form in solitude some new scheme of pleasure or security.

" Resolving now to try the force of gratitude, he enquired for men of science, whose merit was obscured by poverty. His house was soon crowded with poets, sculptors, painters, and designers, who wantoned in unexperienced plenty, and employed their powers in celebration of their patron. But in a short time they forgot the distress from which they had been rescued, and began to consider their deliverer as a wretch of narrow capacity, who was growing great by works which he could not perform, and whom they overpaid by condescending to accept his bounties. Abouzaid heard their mumurs, and dismissed them, and from that hour continued blind to colours, and deaf to panegyric.

" As the sons of art departed, muttering threats of perpetual infamy, Abouzaid, who stood at the gate, called to him Hamet the poet, 'Hamet,' said he, 'thy ingratitude has put an end to my hopes and experiments; I have now learned the vanity of those labours, that wish to be rewarded by human benevolence; I shall henceforth do good, and avoid evil, without respect to the opinion of men; and resolve to solicit only the approbation of that being, whom alone we are sure to please, by endeavouring to please him."—(No. 190.)

None will, I believe, presume to affirm that this description is either just or natural. The events of life, notwithstanding their accidental contrariety, will ever be found, upon a close inspection, to bear a greater or less resemblance to each other. Riches, it is certain, will most generally produce splendour, and poverty despondence. It is also certain, that the rich man will possess more means of gratification than he that is poor; and he will generally be enabled to vary his pleasures, or to combine them, so as to compensate

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in some measure the want of novelty: this is not to be acquired by indigence. The mind is apt to reject, as false, that which towers too much above common events, and common exeperience; and to exceed probability, is generally the fate of those who too much indulge their imagination. Something more than disapprobation is incurred by that moralist, who neglects truth to indulge a vitiated principle of gloomy, and, perhaps, envious speculation. If we are to suppose the writings of Dr. Johnson to have been a transcript of his mind, he must have been wretched "*beyond all names of wretchedness.*" But here reason pauses, and deliberate reflexion penetrates the veil. *Incredulus odi.*

Dr. Johnson uniformly displays to us all the miseries of life: but where shall we find one scene of its felicities. That it has felicities every man's bosom will inform him; and that it has misfortunes is no less certain. Both are certain, and much of both depends upon ourselves. I think it will be found that every stage of existence possesses its appropriate plea-

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sures ; nor are the thoughtless murmurs of inexperience, or the captious complaints of debility, to be the estimate of the whole. Johnson has drawn an invidious and cynical comparison between youth and age, (No. 196) in which more ill nature than truth predominates.

In No 203 is the following severe observation ; it cannot be called just.

" So full is the world of calamity, that every source of pleasure is polluted, and every retirement of tranquility disturbed. When time has supplied us with events sufficient to employ our thoughts, it has mingled them with so many disasters, that we shrink from their remembrance, dread their intrusion upon our minds, and fly from them as from enemies that pursue us with torture."

It is difficult to conceive a man more oppressed with melancholy, or more governed by prejudice, than Dr. Johnson.*

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* That his prejudices were ever on the wing for gratification may fairly be presumed from the following anecdote.

His first introduction to Mrs. Thrale, now Mrs. Piozzi, was brought about by the means of Mr. Woodhouse, who had at that time excited considerable interest by the publication

In him there is no variation; he is for ever one and the same. All his pictures are alike, and in all we trace the reflection

lication of his poems. Dr. Johnson expressed a wish to see him, and Mr. Murphy, the common mediator, proposed an interview at Mrs. Thrale's. This was assented to, and the mighty Doctor repaired thither accordingly. After some conversation had taken place, Mrs. T. who purposed presenting Mr. W. with a copy of Newton's Milton, requested him to step with her into the library. Johnson, who was never remarkable for politeness, immediately followed. "Well Madam, and what book have you got there?" "Milton's poetical works, Doctor," replied Mrs. T. "Well, and what do you think of Milton?" "I am proud, Doctor, to concur in the general opinion of his excellence." "But is he not in your opinion very prosaic?" continued Johnson. "Oh no; I never could discover it." "Pshaw, replied the petulant Doctor, give me a volume and I'll prove it." A volume was accordingly handed; and opening a part of Comus, he read it in such a wretched manner, and with such determined impropriety, as would have rendered disgusting the sublimest productions which ever flowed from the pen of man. Having finished, he exclaimed with unmanly exultation, "There now, did I not say he was prosaic."

Here is a striking instance of the stubborness of his prejudices, which would suffer no opportunity to escape of injuring the reputation of a man for whom he had conceived a dislike, owing to his political tenets, which differed from those of his own. That heart must indeed be totally lost to virtue, which could seek at the distance of near a hundred years to blast the memory of one who avowed principles not exactly conformable to his own, and which could never have occasioned to him one moment's inconvenience. Yet it is probable this very cause, and this alone, induced him to join in the infamous attack of Lauder, and to assist him in that transaction.

tion of a cynic. His sensations could seldom be enviable; he must have turned away with visible horror and disgust from all that bore the smiles of happiness, or the gaiety of mirth.

The history of Seged, Emperor of Ethiopia, is the last description which this work presents. It would be idle to transcribe it, for no new remarks could be introduced. What has been said of Almamoulin and Abouzaid, may be said of Seged, for they have all the same end.

It is remarkable that Johnson was not aware of his great error; for in his last paper he thus delivers himself:

"In the pictures of life I have never been so studious of novelty or surprise as to depart wholly from all resemblance; a fault which writers, deservedly celebrated, frequently commit, that they may raise, as the occasion requires, either mirth or abhorrence."

This is indeed a striking example of the vanity of all human knowledge. The genius even of Johnson was incapable of whispering what all the world could see; or if it did whisper, its voice was soon

lost

lost amidst the rude collision of pride, prejudice, and credulity. It can hardly be suspected that he was fully aware of this his greatest fault. More reverence is due to his integrity than to harbour the suspicion.

How much it is to be regretted that he who knew so well what ought to be done, should yet fail to do it. Immediately following the above quotation is the subsequent remark: "Some enlargement may be allowed to declamation, and some exaggeration to burlesque; but as they deviate farther from reality, they become less useful, because their lessons will fail of application. The mind of the reader is carried away from the contemplation of his own manners; he finds in himself no likeness to the phantom before him, and though he laughs or rages, is not reformed."

The first part of this sentence seems to intimate that there was something to palliate which he was aware of; some censure to avert which he apprehended; while the latter only displays, how much easier it is to deliver precepts than act from them.

These remarks have been written with freedom;

freedom; they have been in no manner biassed by the authority of a great name, or the common suffrages of blind enthusiasm. Justice now demands that I should say something of the beauties of this work, for beauties it certainly possesses. Some of them it will be sufficient to point out, others I shall transcribe.

A noble effusion of Johnson's mind is the seventh Rambler, and which, perhaps, is not exceeded by any he afterwards wrote. It contains many just and penetrating remarks, great sublimity of sentiment, and energy of language, originality of speculation, and a most pious and worthy end. Johnson will perhaps never be excelled by any writer on religion. All his papers on that subject breathe a spirit of the most elevated piety. The solemnity of his language, the multiplicity of his ideas, the vigour of his intellect, and the sincerity of his heart, all conspire to give an awful dignity to his religious writings, which can hardly fail of awakening the most obdurate mind. I confess I never rise from a perusal of this paper without a most thorough conviction

viction of all that it inculcates. None who shall read it with due attention, will I think be able to deny the efficacy of retirement for the advancement of religion. I cannot resist the pleasure of transcribing the following paragraphs with which it concludes.

" The great art, therefore, of piety, and the end for which all the rites of religion seem to be instituted, is the perpetual renovation of the motives to virtue, by a voluntary employment of our mind in the contemplation of its excellence, its importance, and its necessity, which, in proportion as they are more frequently and more willingly revolved, gain a more forcible and permanent influence, till in time they become the reigning ideas, the standing principles of action, and the test by which every thing proposed to the judgment is rejected or approved.

" To facilitate this change of our affections it is necessary that we weaken the temptation of the world, by retiring at certain seasons from it; for its influence, arising only from its presence, is much lessened when it becomes the

object

object of solitary meditation. A constant residence amidst noise and pleasure, inevitably obliterates the impressions of piety; and a frequent abstraction of ourselves into a state where this life, like the next, operates only upon the reason, will reinstate religion in its just authority, even without those irradiations from above, the hope of which I have no intention to withdraw from the sincere and the diligent.

"This is that conquest of the world and of ourselves which has been always considered as the perfection of human nature; and this is only to be obtained by fervent prayer, steady resolutions, and frequent retirement from folly and vanity; from the cares of avarice, and the joys of intemperance; from the lulling sounds of deceitful flattery, and the tempting sight of prosperous wickedness."

Another valuable Paper is No. 11, in which the folly of anger is finely illustrated, and its effects displayed. Here he directs his censure against a domestic evil, and one which for its pernicious consequences, was well worthy the consideration

sideration of Johnson. Whether he was peculiarly conscious of this, or whether he wrote merely the natural suggestions of his own mind, I know not, but he has manifested against it a noble indignation and contempt; and has shewn with much force and novelty, how despicable it renders the man who indulges it; and the calamity which it is ever liable to produce. His arguments are all of them just and apposite; and they are valuable on account of their relation to common life, and of their general use. They may, indeed, be applied upon innumerable occasions, and I am willing to believe, that if applied properly, they would not be without effect; for they must recommend themselves by their truth. The meanness of passion is well described in the following passage:

"Those sudden bursts of rage generally break out upon small occasions; for life, unhappy as it is, cannot supply great evils as frequently as the man of fire thinks fit to be enraged; therefore, the first reflection upon his violence must shew him that he is mean enough

to

to be driven from his post by every petty incident, that he is the mere slave of casualty, and that his reason and virtue are in the power of the wind."

Who can read the subsequent delineation of its effects without a sigh; and without confessing almost with tears, the melancholy truth? For who is there, that has not, in a greater or lefs degree, felt it; so extensive is the influence of this dreadful vice.

"When a man has once suffered his mind to be thus vitiated, he becomes one of the most hateful and unhappy beings. He can give no security to himself that he shall not at the next interview alienate, by some sudden transport, his dearest friend, or break out, upon some slight contradiction, into such terms of rudeness, as can never be perfectly forgotten. Whoever converses with him, lives with the suspicion and solicitude of a man that plays with a tame tiger, always under a necessity of watching the moment in which the capricious savage shall begin to growl."

The miseries of the old age of a passionate

sionate man is depicted in the most affecting colours, and with an accuracy of judgment, which surpasses all commendation. It is, indeed, a picture such as the mind of Johnson only could have drawn; a picture at once vigorous, comprehensive, and faithful.

" Nothing is more despicable or more miserable than the old age of a passionate man. When the vigour of youth fails him, and his amusements pall with frequent repetition, his occasional rage sinks, by decay of strength, into peevishness; that peevishness, for want of novelty and variety, becomes habitual; the world falls off from around him, and he is left, as Homer expresses it, *to devour his own heart in solitude and contempt.*"

The allegories of Johnson, tho' not numerous, are, I think, always just; and I know not whether they may not be preferred to those of Addison for strength and invention. The principal allegories of the Rambler are, those of Criticism, No. 3; of Hope, No. 67; the Voyage of Life, No. 102; and that of Wit and Learning, No. 22; which last exceeds any that this

this language can produce. It exhibits all the powers of invention in the most charming combination; of wit replete with delicacy, and of Learning guided by judgment. The allegory is in itself so complete, that I know nothing which could be added or taken away without injury; and the language is at the same time so pure and nervous, that praise is lost in admiration and delight. This alone would have conferred the title of poet upon Johnson, had his imitations of Juvenal never been written; and I doubt whether he does not rather merit it from this and his other allegories than from all the rhymes he ever published. This, indeed, was the opinion of his friend and contemporary, Dr. Goldsmith, who observed he was more a poet in his prose than in his imitations, and his authority must be allowed to have some weight even though my own opinions should be rejected. It is not merely the cadence of the syllables, or the final jingle of the words which constitute a poet; for these are trifling and mechanical; but it is that power of invention, that strength of imagery,

imagery, and that vigour and variety of combination, which confer that glorious title. No reader of Johnson can be ignorant of the eminent degree in which he possesses all these qualities, and which he adorns and illustrates with all the strength of reason, all the power of eloquence, and all the harmony of language.

The length of this allegory forbids an entire transcription; but I must beg the attention of my readers to a perusal of two paragraphs, which contain a nice discrimination of the different conduct, and a fine example of the necessity, of the union, of *Wit* and *Learning*.

" Their conduct was, whenever they desired to recommend themselves to distinction, entirely opposite. Wit was daring and adventurous; Learning cautious and deliberate. Wit thought nothing reproachful but dullness; Learning was afraid of no imputation but that of error. Wit answered before he understood, lest his quickness of apprehension should be questioned; Learning paused where there was no difficulty, lest any insidious sophism should lie undiscovered.

discovered. Wit perplexed every debate by rapidity and confusion; Learning tired the hearers with endless distinctions, and prolonged the dispute without advantage, by proving that which never was denied. Wit in hopes of shining, would venture to produce what he had not considered, and often succeeded beyond his own expectation by following the train of a lucky thought; Learning would reject every new notion for fear of being entangled in consequences which she could not foresee, and was often hindered by her caution from pressing her advantages and subduing her opponent. Both had prejudices which, in some degree, hindered their progress toward perfection and left them open to attacks. Novelty was the darling of Wit, and antiquity of Learning. To Wit all that was new was specious; to Learning whatever was ancient was venerable.—Wit, however, seldom failed to divert those whom he could not convince, and to convince was not often his ambition; Learning always supported her opinion with so many collateral truths, that when the cause was decided against her,

her, her arguments were remembered with admiration."

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"Disgusted with these desertions, the two rivals at the same time petitioned Jupiter for re-admission to their native habitations. Jupiter thundered on the right hand, and they prepared to obey the happy ſummons. Wit readily ſpread his wings and ſoared aloft; but not being able to ſee far, was bewildered in the pathleſs immenſity of the ethereal ſpaces. Learning, who knew the way, ſhook her pinions; but for want of natural vigour, could only take ſhort flights: ſo, after many efforts, they both ſunk again to the ground, and learned, from their mutual diſtreſs, the neceſſity of union.—They, therefore, joined their hands and renewed their flight: Learning was borne up by the vigour of Wit, and Wit guided by the perſpicuity of Learning. They ſoon reached the dwellings of Jupiter; and were ſo endeared to each other, that they lived afterwards in perpetual concord. Wit perſuaded Learning to converſe with the Graces, and Learning engaged Wit in the ſervice

of the Virtues. They were now the favourites of all the Powers of Heaven, and gladdened every banquet by their presence. They soon after married at the command of Jupiter, and had a numerous progeny of Arts and Sciences."

It is needless to say how far this transcends all eulogy, which would scarcely be adequate, were we to exhaust all the arts of flattery, and all the modes of praise. We can only read, and silently admire the stupendous genius which was capable of exhibiting such a perfect picture.

Johnson was a zealous assertor of virtue and religion, and never failed to attack with the thunder of his writings those who dared to violate them. Nor did he exhaust his rage merely to display imaginary beauties of phraseology, or powers of argument, (as is too often the case) without any real participation of what he wrote; his piety* was acknow-

* A story is related of Johnson, which whether true or false, I will not determine.

Being once engaged in a party of pleasure on the water, they had reached the spot whence they were to depart, and some of the company had already entered the boat. Johnson

knowledged to be great; and his *motives*, whatever consequences might ensue from his *actions*, were I believe never thought to have been depraved; and these qualities, above all his others, demand our esteem. He that shall despair to possess the genius of Johnson, let him endeavour to imitate his virtues, and if he cannot equal him as a writer, which is very doubtful, and at best but indifferent, let him aspire to his piety and goodness, which is always attainable and always beneficial.

No. 77 of the Rambler presents a noble specimen of virtuous indignation against the immorality of authors. It might, indeed, be recommended to the serious perusal of some writers of the present day,

son was upon the point of doing the same, when, by accident, he learnt that Mr. Hume was there; and enquiring of those who stood near, if it was Mr. Hume, the Deist, and being answered in the affirmative, he declared, that he would not trust his life on the water in the company of such a person; and he actually departed.—This, I must confess, appears to me to have been the effect of a weak superstition, rather than of a well-grounded piety; or, perhaps it might have proceeded from Johnson's well-known antipathy to Hume, owing to the disrespectful mention that Gentleman had made of The Rambler during its publication.

day, who would do well to listen to its dictates.—Such, I would be understood, as that gross and libidinous creature, who styles himself Peter Pindar, that violator of all morality and religion Godwin, and others needless to enumerate. Johnson never employs ridicule against any vice he would extirpate ; he always chuses the more solemn and efficacious powers of reason and argument. He does not strive to laugh you out of your follies or your errors, but he demonstrates with perspicuity wherein it is wrong; and where it degrades you from your station as a rational being ; and then having awakened the mind to a sense of its impropriety, he displays, with inimitable majesty and force, the consequences they lead to ; and, in a moral estimation, how loudly they call for repression and extinction. This it is which gives that peculiar energy to his writings, and which renders them far more valuable than those of Addison, who, by adopting ridicule for his weapon, often amused *only*, where he intended to instruct, and his precepts were frequently forgotten amid

amid the general hilarity, which the gaiety of his essays produced; hence, where the latter is once mentioned, the former is quoted perhaps a hundred times, on account that his writings being totally divested of that unseasonable mirth, the mind is never divided by laughter and seriousness, but the effect being uniform, they make a constant and equable impression, and rarely fade off the memory.

The native vigour of Johnson's mind is finally displayed in this essay. What he censures he sensures with dignity; and never degenerates into that vulgarity of diction, which sometimes characterize the most valuable productions. He is lofty and sublime; and he appeals to the heart without exciting the passions. He disdained the meanness of controversial epithets, and always maintains an innate grandeur of thought and expression which chains the attention of the reader, and forcibly impresses conviction. He discusses, with great ability, the right of authors to complain of neglect, which too often proceeds from their own vices and immorality.

immorality. After some consideration of the necessity of a moralist's conformity to his precepts, which he decides negatively, he presents the following eloquent and judicious remarks on those authors who are vicious both in their actions and in their writings.

" Yet many have dared to boast of neglected merit, and to challenge their age for cruelty and folly, of whom it cannot be alledged that they have endeavoured to encrease the wisdom or virtue of their readers; they have been at once profligate in their lives and licentious in their compositions; have not only forsaken the paths of virtue, but attempted to lure others after them. They have smoothed the road of perdition, covered with flowers the thorns of guilt, and taught temptation sweeter notes, softer blandishments, and stronger allurements."

Johnson could censure with freedom what he knew no malace, however bitter, or revenge, however inveterate, could retort upon himself.—It is certain he never employed his pen in the cause of vice;

vice; he never flattered any patron, nor sought reward from any dedication. He never gratified envy by personal satire; nor did he conciliate esteem from the powerful by exertions to crush the weak. He always preserved an independence glorious in itself, and in the highest degree honourable. What he wrote was for subsistence for the day that was passing over him; yet the pressures of poverty never compelled him to a mean action or a literary fraud. Conscious of his integrity, and indignant at every species of vice, he was

> To Virtue only and her friends a friend,
> The world beside might murmur, or commend.
>
> POPE.

It is then no wonder that he should betray rather an unusual warmth in his fulminations against those monsters of society, who employ all the arts of rhetoric, and all the subtilties of learning, to lure mankind into their snares. He foresaw the consequences which their writings led to, and how much injury one individual might do whose precepts were

were widely disseminated. The vulgar and unthinking are captivated by all that wears the appearance of novelty; their minds are contracted, and unable to look forward to any great distance; they persist with obstinacy in the pleasing error; and deluded by the promises, and deceitful blandishments of those in whom they confide, the ruin which they have never suspected, at length bursts upon them in an unguarded moment, and either overwhelms them in the confusion, or debilitates the powers which might lead them back to virtue. These are the dreadful effects to be apprehended, and are in some measure inevitable; and these effects are produced by the perversion of powers vested by the Almighty in our hands, for the advancement of morality and religion.

The beings capable of ſuch atrocity are considered in the following manner by our pious author; and I regret to say that of these profligate wretches there are now too many suffered to infest the public with their shameless writings, which while they disgrace their authors and infect

fect the common weal, throw a shade of opprobrium on the legislature of the country.

" The wickedness of a loose or profane author is more atrocious than that of the giddy libertine, or drunken ravisher, not only because it extends its effects wider, as a pestilence that taints the air is more destructive than poison infused in a draught, but because it is committed with cool deliberation. By the instantaneous violence of desire, a good man may sometimes be surprized before reflection can come to his rescue; when the appetites have strengthened their influence by habit, they are not easily resisted or suppressed; but for the frigid villainy of studious lewdness, for the calm malignity of laboured impiety, what apology can be invented? What punishment can be adequate to the crime of him who retires to solitude for the refinement of debauchery; who tortures his fancy and ransacks his memory only that he may leave the world less virtuous than he found it; that he may intercept the hopes of the rising generation, and spread snares

snares for the soul with more dexterity . . . . . If, having extinguished in themselves the distinction of right and wrong, they were insensible of the mischief which they promoted, they deserved to be hunted down by the general compact as no longer partaking of social nature; if influenced by the corruption of patrons or readers, they sacrificed their own convictions to vanity or interest, they were to be abhorred with more acrimony than he that murders for pay; since they committed greater crimes without greater temptations . . . . . Surely none can think without horror on that man's condition, who has been more wicked in proportion as he had more means of excelling in virtue, and used the light imparted from heaven only to embellish folly, and shed lusture upon crimes."

Apart from a moral consideration I would recommend the three papers (86, 88, 90,) on Milton, as an elegant specimen of criticism, and greatly divested of that ill nature which distinguished his subsequent remarks. He has determined

mined with great precision wherein the true harmony of the English poetry consists, and has considered the versification of Milton with great judgment. These papers are indeed a valuable accession to literary criticism.

Innumerable are the beauties of this work which might be noticed; but it would be in some measure idle; for where is the person who lays any claim to learning that has not read the Rambler of Johnson? The History of Anningait and Ajut is pleasing; and the concluding paper is a noble specimen of literary magnanimity; in which the author disclaims all protection or favour during the progress of his work, and anticipates censure by a firm avowal, that he sought only the advancement of morality, and "that he shall never envy the honours which wit and learning obtain in any other cause, if he can be numbered among the writers who have given ardour to virtue and confidence to truth."

The capacious powers of Johnson's mind are, indeed, truly astonishing. He confesses that the number of his friends were

were never great during the publication of his Rambler. Yet he says there were "such as would not suffer him to think he was writing in vain." Two hundred and eight papers comprize this work: and he discharges all the favours he received by the acknowledgement of six out of this number. The rest were all the offspring of his own intellect; and nearly the whole of these are original: there are perhaps some few exceptions*.

When we reflect on this, does not the boasted fecundity of Addison shrink into a smaller circle? and do not the powers of his mind fade before the regular and sublime genius of Johnson? Great respect

* The rapidity with which he composed was truly astonishing. He used to affirm that he would sometimes begin to write a sermon after dinner, and send it off by the post of that night.

"I wrote forty eight of the printed octavo pages of the Life of Savage at a sitting; but then I sat up all night. † I have also written six sheets in a day of translation from the French." *Boswell's Journal, page* 55.

This extreme facility however he used justly to consider as the effect of habit. Many of his papers in the Rambler were written in the midst of conversation and company. Sir Joshua Reynolds one day observing this, asked him, how he could possibly arrange his ideas, or be sufficiently abstracted as to compose at such periods? "Oh, Sir, he replied, it is quite mechanical."

† The whole Life it is related was finished in thirty-six hours.

spect and veneration are due to the writings of Addison; but far greater to those of Johnson. Indeed they will hardly admit of comparison. — Johnson possessed powers unattainable by Addison; and Addison moved in a circle where Johnson could not approach. Addison is gay and lively; Johnson grave and sententious. Addison is sometimes trifling; Johnson is always uniform. Addison is seldom more than pleasing; Johnson is often sublime;* the language of Addison is pure and simple; that of Johnson's is nervous and elegant; Addison's is equable, and never offends by its harshness; Johnson's is sometimes rugged and pedantic; Addison is never affecting; Johnson

* There is an inexpressible grandeur in the following passage. Many others might be produced, but this shall suffice:

"If those, who pass their days in plenty and security, could visit for an hour the diurnal receptacles to which the prostitute retires from her nocturnal excursions, and see the wretches that lie crowded together, mad with intemperance, ghastly with famine, nauseous with filth, and noisome with disease, it would not be easy for any degree of abhorrence to harden them against compassion, or to repress the desire which they must immediately feel to rescue such numbers of human beings from a state so dreadful."

Johnson is often highly pathetic;* Addison displays no irregular flights, no sudden inspirations; Johnson rises with his subject, and frequently towers into sublimity; Addison exhibits more learning than Johnson; Johnson manifests more natural vigour of intellect; finally, the writings of Addison are less read and less remembered than those of Johnson, which are in every body's hands, and are for ever quoted.

Those who do not lie under the influence of a name, and those whose judgments are free from bigotry, will find this parallel just. I venerate the name of Addison, and regard him as a glory to his country; but a long acquaintance with his writings, and those of Johnson, and an impartial estimate of their respective merits incline me to award the preference to the latter for the reasons above stated. To

* There is something pleasingly pathetic in the following remarks;

"In spring the heart of tranquility dances to the melody of the groves, and the eye of benevolence sparkles at the sight of happiness and plenty; in the winter compassion melts at universal calamity, and the tear of softness starts at the wailings of hunger, and the cries of the creation in distress."

To the Rambler only one objection can be preferred, and that indeed is rather a weighty one. The pictures of life which it contains are *always false*. They are the monstrous distortions of prejudice, which bear no resemblance to any thing existing; they are the phantoms of a morbid mind, exhibiting no traces of reality. This, in my opinion, greatly disqualifies the work for the hands of youth. Innumerable are the effects which they might produce on the ductile minds of *juvenescence**, when the principles are beginning to assume consistency, and the judgment to corroborate opinions.

> In the morn
> And liquid dew of life contagious
> Blastments are most imminent.
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

This is indeed a time when the fancy being active, and the intellect vigorous, and eager after novelty, impressions are received which subsequent experience can rarely eradicate. It is then that amuse-

ments

* This word is not, I believe, authorised by any precedent, but I consider it as unexceptionable.

ments often grow into habits, and these again not unfrequently become principles of action. The mind being thus pliant, and naturally charmed with what is contrary to common observation, or what is in itself surprising or affecting, it is easy to conjecture what fatal prejudices might be engendered by a too early initiation into the persuasive eloquence of Johnson. It is natural to regard that as true which experience does not contradict, and that which is acknowledged to be just will always have a power which few are willing to oppose. This influence may be justly dreaded from those delineations of Johnson which are to be found in his Rambler, and some other of his writings. In short, considered as a moral production, and as a system of ethics by which we ought to regulate our actions, and estimate their rectitude or obliquity, it is an inestimable work, but if considered as a faithful picture of life and manners, and an impartial examination of the felicity and infelicity of existence, it will be found abundant in error, clouded with prejudice, and in a great

degree

degree visionary and declamatory; and hence a most unfit book to be put in the hands of contemplative youth, unless first weeded of these impurities.* In

* The following judicious remarks on the constitutional melancholy of this writer, I shall do myself the pleasure of transcribing, and I trust they will prove acceptable to my readers.

"As he failed to meet with happiness in the rough paths in which he was compelled to remain, he considered all other passages through our existence as equally impeded by labour and sorrow. In the mist which poverty raised around him, he saw darkly; and those eminences, whose tops were surrounded with a purer air, and more genial atmosphere, were hidden from his sight; when therefore he came forth as a moral writer, his step was indeed vigorous and full of majesty; his demeanour manly and impressive. But dark clouds invested the visage of this great philosopher, and the thunder of his voice was heard with gloomy awe. His readers beheld him with the same dismay with which the sailors of Columbus surveyed the cloud-capped genius of the Cape; they dropped their oars in listless fear, and the whole face of the ocean was darkened by this terrific appearance. The sublime mind of Camoens could fancy the vast Atlantic lulled into a dead calm by the presence of this dæmon of terror; and a sensation not dissimilar to this is effected by the not less formidable and gigantic appearance of Johnson rising in the moral world. He warns those who attempt to navigate the broad ocean of life, of dangers which no prudence can prevent, and of sorrows which no degree of philosophy can palliate, and no fortitude sustain. The Prince of Abyssinia, when he quitted the cloudless atmosphere of the happy

In this decision I trust I ſhall not be deemed irreverent to the immortal name of Johnson. No excellence however great, nor no genius however ſublime, ought to deter a man from displaying, with moderation, the evils which ſometimes lurk behind the ſplendour of language and the ſtrength of argument; for theſe excreſcences diſcovered, and either cut away, or guarded againſt, impart a ſtronger ray of majeſty to that excellence which they before contaminated. And in detecting the

valley, finds in his ſearch of public employ, or of general amuſement, uniform diſguſt and diſappointment; while his ſiſter in her viſits to haunts of private comfort and domeſtic intercourſe, meets only withſus picion, miſery, and repentance. In the *Vanity of Human Wiſhes* the ſorrows of the ſtudent are written with ſuch preciſeneſs of detail, that it is ſaid the author himſelf could not read the melancholy paragraph without an effuſion of tears. The papers in the Rambler, in which any views of life are introduced, diſplay the ſame perturbed imagination, and the vigorous, but gloomy powers of "Dolorous Declamation." Theſe obſervations, if they be true, though they diminiſh not the literary talents and uncommon ſagacity of Johnſon, yet do they introduce a doubt whether the utility of his writings as a moraliſt may not be queſtioned. The ſea of life muſt be navigated by the timid and the bold; and he who places an azimuth in the hand of the voyager, performs a more uſeful as well as more grateful ſervice, than he who alarms his mind with the probability of impending ſtorms, and adds to his natural fears by elaborate deſcriptions of hidden rocks, and inevitable ſhipwrecks. *Brit. Mag. vol.* 1. *p.* 219.

the fallacy of Johnson, I only deterge his writings from those impurities which none can admire, and none can be anxious to conceal.

The London, and Vanity of Human Wishes of Johnson, may be considered as forming a part of his moral writings; but they add nothing to his fame, and would in all probability have been forgotten, had he written nothing else. Indeed he possessed little that could dignify poetry. He has none of those daring sublimities which give energy to description, none of those gentle graces which relieve attention. His acquaintance with the English language never suffered him to want an appropriate expression or a pleasing ryhme; but there is a monotony which dwells upon the ear, and renders his versification dull and unpleasing. Of many of his verses, it may be said they are

> Such lays as neither ebb nor flow,
> Correctly cold, and regularly low,
> That shunning faults one quiet tenor keep,
> We cannot blame indeed—but we may sleep.
>
> Pope.

This

This can however be said only of parts, there being some lines which may justly contest even the superiority with Pope. But London presents less of these than the Vanity of Human Wishes. Yet the former is said to have obtained the approbation of a man (Pope) well qualified to judge; who declared that the author of such an excellent work could not be long concealed. This story is related, but is, I think, little deserving of credit. Pope, whose ear was accustomed to the nicest harmony, and who could easily discern the minutest deviation from propriety, can hardly be supposed to have overlooked the many weak lines and puerile tautologies which this presents; and if he saw them, it can as little be supposed that he would have conferred upon it such a disqualified commendation.*

It

* "His poetry, though not any where loaded with epithets, is destitute of animation. We are now and then struck with a fine thought, a fine line, or a fine passage, but little interested by the whole. After reading his best pieces once, few are desirous of reading them again."

Life of Johnson, 8 vo. 1785.

It is an invidious mode of criticism to detect and expose trifling errors in a work, which otherwise abounds in beauties; it displays a mean appetence to detraction; and a mind void of sensibility. Yet as much indiscriminate praise has been lavished on this poem of Johnson's, and has even been preferred by some to his Vanity of Human Wishes, and as its faults have been hitherto unnoticed, a few remarks may be offered without any disingenuous imputation. I am far from wishing to detract in the smallest degree from the great fame of Johnson, and I am besides aware, that no examination of his poetry can do it, however severe it may be. He has been read, and praised, and imitated, as a philosopher, a moralist, and an elegant prose writer; but none yet ever did, or ever can, confer upon him the appellation of poet. I therefore only propose to myself, in exposing a few trifling errors, to give confidence to unambitious modesty, and to instruct the blind admirers of this stupendous genius that even *he* is not infallible.

It

It is always deemed unlucky to stumble upon the threshold. In the third couplet however, Johnson has fallen into a manifest tautology.

"Resolved at length from vice and London *far*
"To breathe in *distant* fields a purer air."

This indeed was hardly to have been expected from the usual correctness of his language, which was in general scrupulous of the words adopted, even to a fault. Yet we have the same impropriety again, a few lines afterwards.

With slavish tenets *taint* our *poisoned* youth.

It is impossible to taint a body already poisoned. If there be a weaker line in the namby pamby verses of Philips, or the dull page of Tate, I will confess my inability to discover it. It is indeed surprizing, that the perspicuity of Johnson's mind, which could so readily detect the deviations of other poets, should have been incapable of correcting his own*. But

* He did not often conform himself to his own precepts. In his Essay on Pope's Epitaphs, (which is indeed an invidious piece of criticism,) he says, "I think it may be obseved

But the fondness of a parent, rarely beholds the imperfections of his offspring.

The concluding line of this poem is remarkably weak, and the last part is indeed a mere languid iteration of the former.

These are a few of the faults of this imitation, and these are sufficient to answer my purpose. I now hasten to the more agreeable task of pointing out some of its most striking beauties, which I trust will be more agreeable to my reader. The description of London is spirited and just; for who can deny but that

" Here malice, rapine, accident, conspire,
And now a rabble rages, now a fire;
Their ambush here relentless ruffians lay,
And here the fell attorney prowls for prey;
Here

observed that the particle *O!* used at the beginning of a sentence, always offends." Yet, in his translation of the dialogue between Hector and Andromache, he himself uses it. *Ex.*

" How would the Trojans brand great Hector's name,
And one base action sully all my fame,
Acquired by wounds and battles bravely fought!
Oh! how my soul abhors so mean a thought."

And in many other of his pieces, as his " Lines to a Friend," " To a Young Lady on her birth-day," &c. &c.

Here falling houses thunder on your head,
And here a female atheist talks you dead."

There is something colloquial and vulgar in the expression *talks you dead*, which is not suited to the dignity of poetry. In theſe lines also, he uses the initial resemblances, or alliterations, though he censures them in his life of Gray.

Johnson had the power of reasoning in verse, though he did not always reason with cogency, nor did he possess the vigour of Pope in condensing much meaning in a few words. That is a power granted but to few, and is not much the effect of study. But he is seldom more pleasing than in the following lines:

"But thou, should tempting villainy present
All Marlborough hoarded or all Villiers spent,
Turn from the glittering bribe thy scornful eye,
Nor sell for gold what gold can never buy,
The peaceful slumber, self approving day,
Unsullied fame, and conscience ever gay."

After enumerating with indignation, the vices and snares of the metropolis, the poet takes occasion to break out into the following exclamation.

"Has

" Has heaven reserved in pity to the poor
No pathless waste or undiscovered shore?
No secret island in the boundless main?
No peaceful desert yet unclaimed by Spain?
Quick let us rise, the happy seats explore,
And bear oppression's insolence no more.
This mournful truth is every where confessed,
Slow rises worth by poverty depressed."

These are perhaps the beauties of *Johnson's poem*, but they surely are not the *beauties of poetry*.

The Vanity of Human Wishes is by far more energetic, and more pleasing than London.—Whether it be that the author had improved his taste or his judgment; whether he was seized with some sudden inspiration, or whether he was intent upon exposing what he had long beheld with pain and anxiety, I know not; but it certainly contains more masterly touches, more spirited delineations, more vigour of sentiment, and compression of language than his London. This was indeed his favourite topic.

His Vanity of Human Wishes was published the year preceeding the commencement of his Rambler. It may therefore be expected to contain some

of

of those sombre pictures, and doleful declamations which that work presents. And this expectation will not be disappointed, for it does in fact abound in them, and they are, in consequence, the most pleasing parts of the poem. Some of these therefore, I shall transcribe, as exhibiting more happy efforts of Johnson's poetic powers.

I will not vouch for the truth of the following lines, but must affirm, that they afford a rich repast to the melancholy mind, and to those whom disappointment have taught the necessity of patience.

" On ev'ry stage the foes of peace attend,
Hate dogs their flight, and insult mocks their end.
Love ends with hope, the sinking Statesman's door
Pours in the morning worshipper no more;
For growing names the weekly scribbler lies,
To growing wealth the dedicator flies.
From every room descends the painted face
That hung the bright palladium of the place;
And smoked in kitchens or in auctions sold,
To better features yields the frame of gold:
For now no more we trace in ev'ry line
Heroic worth, benevolence divine;
The form distorted justifies the fall,
And detestation rids the indignant wall."

There

There is much of keen satire and animated diction in this passage, and it would have been no disgrace to the pen of Pope or Dryden. It has indeed been the opinion of some, that had Johnson cultivated poetry, he would have equalled the former author in his versification, and in his language. Of this no one can be certain; and all conjectures are vain; but there exist no solid grounds for the inference. Those who regard poetry as mechanical, may perhaps believe it; but those who consder it as intuitive and not to be acquired, will reject it as idle. What Johnson could not attain at forty years of age, it is not likely he ever would attain afterwards. It is my opinion, that no labour or study, however assiduous, could possibly have ever rendered him equal to Pope, whose melody and genius yet remain unequalled.

I have been told that the author could never read the following description of the student's progress without tears. Why he should have been so powerfully affected by a description to which he

was

was familiar, it is now in vain to enquire; it does not possess sufficient pathos to draw tears, I believe, from the eyes of any other reader.—But this story is, I think, little probable, for "wonders are willingly told and willingly believed." I shall, however, transcribe the passage, and then leave my reader to consult his own feelings and determine whether it be really so affecting as to make him weep.

When first the college rolls receive his name,
The young enthusiast quits his ease for fame;
Resistless burns the fever of renown
Caught from the strong contagion of the gown:
O'er Bodley's dome his future labours spread,
And Bacon's mansion, trembles o'er his head.
Are these thy views? proceed, illustrious youth,
And Virtue guard thee to the throne of truth.
Yet should thy soul indulge the gen'rous heat,
'Till captive science yields her last retreat;
Should reason guide thee with her brightest ray,
And pour on misty doubt resistless day;
Should no false kindness lure to loose delight,
Nor praise relax, nor difficulty fright;
Should tempting novelty thy cell refrain,
And sloth effuse her opiate fumes in vain;
Should beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,
Nor claim the triumph of a letter'd heart:
Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,
Nor Melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade;

Yet

Yet hope not life from grief or danger free,
Nor think the doom of man revers'd for thee;
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes,
And pause awhile from learning to be wise;
There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.
See nations, slowly wise, and meanly just,
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.
If dreams yet flatter, once again attend,
Hear Lydiat's life and Galileo's end,
Nor deem, when learning her last prize bestows,
The glittering eminence exempt from foes.
See when the vulgar 'scapes despis'd or aw'd,
Rebellion's vengeful talons seize on Laud.
From meaner minds, tho' smaller fines content,
The plunder'd palace or sequester'd rent;
Mark'd out by dangerous parts he meets the shock,
And fatal learning leads him to the block.
Around his tomb let art and genius weep;
But hear his death, ye blockheads, hear and sleep."*

To this description praise cannot be denied; for its general viguor and harmony render it a distinguished part of the poem before us. But the propriety of

* This is a subject which he has treated separately, but not so happily as in the above quotation. He considers the young author as publishing his writings, and not meeting with success he retires to some retreat, where safe from critics

"He begs of heaven a less distinguish'd lot,
Glad to be hid, and proud to be forgot."

of the expression, *lettered heart*, is, I think, doubtful.

In point of accuracy and spirit, the description of old age, beginning l. 255, and ending 290, is entitled to high commendation. But it is not, upon the whole, equal to the former. This was, indeed, a subject he delighted to expatiate upon; and has, in the Rambler, described almost every possible misery attendant on that state of debility; and I know not whether those delineations have not more of true poetry in them than the present.

After considering the infelicities of old age, as incident to all men, he proceeds to shew that even the decline of *him* who is exempt from *scorn or crime*; whose life *melts with unperceived decay*; and whose *night congratulating conscience cheers*, is not exempt from some distress, either more or less, and proceeding from a different cause.

" Yet e'en on this, her load misfortune flings,
To press the weary minutes' flagging wings;
New sorrow rises as the day returns,
A sister sickens or a daughter mourns.
Now kindred merit fills the sable bier,
Now lacerated friendship claims a tear.

Year

Year chases year, decay pursues decay,
Still drops some joy from with'ring life away:
New forms arise, and different views engage,
Superfluous lags the veteran on the stage,
Till pitying nature signs the last release,
And bids afflicted worth retire to peace."

From these quotations it is, I think, manifest how far superior the present poem is to the London of Johnson. While the former contains nothing that is remarkable, this frequently presents striking lines and paragraphs, and is often laboured into dignity; the language is more pure, the ideas more vivid, and the versification more harmonious: yet Johnson's claim to poetry is very doubtful. He was too much given to reasoning and declamation ever to attain those heights of sublimity which astonish and delight. If he seldom offends by his harshness he as seldom exhilarates by his vivacity; and though he did not detract from our poetic dignity, he cannot be said to have added any thing to it. As his reflections were always melancholy, so his writings have the same cast: and as this is a disease which does not allow very vigorous or very frequent excursions

sions to the intellect, his images are not much varied; and analogous ideas are generally excited by events the most dissimilar. It was not in his power to assume much variety, nor did he seek to improve this inability by labour; for he was, I believe, little ambitious of the title of poet; an indifference proceeding, perhaps, from a consciousness of natural disqualifications for the exercise of that exalted function. The soft graces he never could attain, though he sometimes exhibits strength and elegance. He was, indeed, soon aware that his abilities did not consist in poetry; for he began it late, and abandoned it early: and it is very probable that had he been exempt from want, he never would have produced the imitations of Juvenal. In short, his poetic character may be given in his own words: "He is elegant but not great; he never labours after exquisite beauties; and he seldom falls into gross faults. His versification is smooth, but rarely vigorous; and his rhymes are remarkably exact."

Rasselas has been considered as the masterpiece of Johnson, and has received very extensive and indeed merited commendation.

mendation. But admiration of the man will often hurry us beyond deserved praise, and sink us in the meanness of hyperbole; and I fear this is sometimes the case with the Prince of Abyssinia. The language is harmonious, the arguments are acute, and the reflections are novel—but with all its splendour it exhibits a gloomy and imperfect picture. An excuse may indeed be offered for the melancholy scenes of life contained in this performance, which must be denied to the Rambler. Every one knows that Rasselas was composed to obtain money to behold an expiring parent whom Johnson tenderly loved; and it may be supposed that the gloom occasioned by such an approaching event, might in some measure tincture his writings. It is also to be remembered that he wrote it in want. These are indeed *raisons de convenance*, and might be admitted, did the Prince of Abyssinia stand out as an exception to his other writings: But as it is too much like all his other speculations upon life, we may justly conclude, that the same Rasselas would have been

produced, had he written it in the sunshine of plenty, and in the gaiety of happiness.

What has been said of the Rambler may be said of Rasselas. It is entitled to every praise which can be bestowed on language, on sentiment, and on argument; it is the production of a mind abundant in allusion, and capable of sublimity. It no where falls off from its dignity, but is uniformly grand even to a fault; for hence arises a want of discrimination which is remarkably obvious. The prince and princess, the waiting maid, the man of learning, and the robber, all discourse in the same exalted style, and reason with the same energy and perspicuity*. Yet this is a fault which

* Let us attend to the following discourse between an Arabian free-booter, and a lady's waiting-woman. The lady, to be sure, does not reason much in the present instance, but the robber is quite a Plato.

" In the morning as I was sitting on the grass, the chief of the troop came towards me. I rose up to receive him, and he bowed with great respect. ' Illustrious Lady,' said he, ' my fortune is better than I had presumed to hope. I am told by my women that I have a princess in my camp.' ' Sir,' answered I, ' your women have deceived themselves and you: I am not a princess, but an unhappy stranger;

which may be pardoned, in consideration of the advantages which we reap from it.

It would be unnecessary for me to analyse or give an abstract of this work which every one has read. I shall therefore pursue the same plan as in my remarks on the Rambler. I shall transcribe peculiar passages, and comment upon them,

stranger, who intended soon to have left this country in which I am now to be imprisoned for ever.' 'Whoever or whencesoever you are,' returned the Arab, 'your dress, and that of your servants, shew your rank to be high, and your wealth to be great. Why should you, who can so easily procure your ransom, think yourself in danger of perpetual captivity? the purpose of my incursions is to increase my riches, or more properly, to gather tribute. The sons of Ishmael are the natural and hereditary lords of this part of the continent, which is usurped by late invaders and low-born tyrants, from whom we are compelled to take by the sword, what is denied to justice. The violence of war admits no distinction; the lance that is lifted at guilt and power will sometimes fall on innocence and gentleness.'

"How little," said I, "did I expect that yesterday it should have fallen upon me."

'Misfortunes,' answered the Arab, 'should always be expected. If the eye of hostility could learn reverence or pity, excellence like yours had been exempt from injury. But the angels of affliction spread their toils alike for the virtuous and the wicked, for the mighty and the mean. Do not be disconsolate: I am not one of the lawless and cruel rovers of the desart: I know the rules of civil life; I will fix your ransom, give a pasport to your messenger, and perform my stipulations with nice punctuality.'

them, and thence draw a general inference. This I regard as the most impartial manner of estimating the merits and defects of any author, for by this mode the reader is equally a judge of the truth of my observations, and may likewise form his own opinions, without the trouble of perpetually referring to the work for conviction, as conviction may be deemed necessary.

The plan proposed in composing Rasselas was to shew the vanity of all human wishes, and how much our most ardent designs may be frustrated by the will of heaven, or by the agency of their fellow creatures. This is indeed a common subject, and I fear a useless one, at least, when treated in the manner which Johnson has done. I know no advantages which mankind can reap from being told that life is one continued scene of misery, and that no condition can afford its possessor happiness. This information, if it were true, every man must know without being told, and as it is false, every man must despise. This is the doctrine of Rasselas, and this is exemplified

emplified by a variety of adventures; yet I may still read and admire it as a pleasing tale, and exhibiting pleasing ideas: but it excites no tumultuous sensations, nor awakens any sympathy; hence it is soon forgotten; the reader finds in it nothing which he has been accustomed to experience or believe; nothing which bears any resemblance to the real events of life; nor any situations which he can assimilate to his mind. The disquisitions which it contains are indeed valuable, but as they are literary, they can have but few admirers. A distinct consideration of a few passages of this work will better enable me to convey my sentiments to my reader.

The history of Imlac is a tissue of disappointments; and of all the schemes of happiness which he had formed he found none successful. He finds himself exposed to theft and exaction because he is young and inexperienced, and he is plundered by merchants, his fellow travellers, merely because they delight thus to shew their superiority. He passes through populous regions, and desolated

desolated countries, and in every situation listlessness, and satiety, and disappointment pursue him. He resolves to add his name to the illustrious fraternity of poets, but finds difficulties to encounter which he cannot overcome. He read all the poets of Persia and Arabia, and could repeat by memory the volumes suspended in the Mosque of Mecca. Resolved to be a poet, he beholds every thing with a new desire, and with a different purpose.——Every thing in nature was of importance; nothing was to be over-looked, for nothing was useless. Plants, animals, minerals, meteors, all conspired to enrich his mind and to supply an inexhaustible source of ideas; and with such a store he would find it easy to vary them by every combination possible.

But he observes "the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition, observe the power of all the pasions in all their combinations,

tions, and trace the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths which will always be the same; he must, therefore, content himself with the slow progress of his name; contemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place. His labour is not yet at an end; he must know many languages and many sciences; —and that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must, by incessant practice, familiarise to himself every delicacy of speech

speech and grace of harmony."* In this attempt he fails, and he therefore continues his travels; and at last, weary of wandering, he resolves to return to his native country and pass the remainder of his life in the midst of his friends.

But

* This idea of the requisite qualifications for a poet is certainly vigorous and sublime; but I very much fear it will be found, upon a nice examination, in many parts purely ideal: or, if it be all just, we must deny that appellation to those upon whom the concurrent suffrages of mankind have conferred it. Not even the sacred majesty of Homer could assume that title, if his claims be estimated by this description. Do the annals of the world or the remotest volumes of antiquity that are extant, boast the man who possessed all these qualities and rendered them subservient to the purposes of poetry? Precepts are to be considered as so many truths deduced by reason from the actual existence of man, from the dictates of experience, and the authority of remote ages. Those which are derived from any other source can aspire merely to the probability of theory, and they are often only the vague conjectures of a glowing intellect and an ardent fancy. If those exalted minds which have produced such noble specimens of composition, and which have been the delight and admiration of successive ages, possess any solid claims to the adoration which have been conceded to them, we must from thence draw our precepts; for that excellence must be allowed to be great which has stood the shocks of barbarism, and emerged unsullied from the clouds of ignorance. And, if such be the case, we can regard this description of Johnson's in some particulars, only as the voluntary effusion of a sprightly imagination, which, in the language of Shakespeare:

"Doth

But he is disappointed. He finds his father is no more; and of his friends the greater part are dead: others do not remember him, and some consider him as corrupted by foreign manners. He therefore resolves to seek for that content in the *happy valley* which he, in vain, sought in the world. But here it is also denied. In the subsequent part of the book he is little conspicuous.

Johnson, warmed with the idea of this imaginary being and his misfortunes, makes him observe, in his colloquy with Rasselas, that there "is so much infelicity in the world, that scarce any man has leisure from his own distresses to estimate the comparative happiness of others." This is, indeed, a querulous eloquence which renders every thing

> "Doth glance from Heav'n to earth,
> From earth to Heav'n,
> And bodies forth the forms
> Of things unknown.

The Picture undoubtedly contains an assemblage of striking images, and though it comprises too much, yet it has some parts exquisitely beautiful. Yet I am afraid that any one who may chance to read it, and resigning himself to the dominion of fancy, will be apt to exclaim with Rasselas, "Enough! thou hast convinced me that no human being can ever be a poet."

thing alike miserable and gloomy. The history of Imlac is not the offspring of a candid moralist who seeks to inculcate important truths beneath the pleasing veil of fiction; it is the well-connected fable of an amusing novelist, and bears no more resemblance to real life than do the fabulous adventures of Lemuel Gulliver. The powers of Johnson's mind were certainly great, but they were seldom assisted by the irradiations of truth, or directed by the hand of wisdom. He imagines evils which were never felt, and frequently injures life by misrepresentations. He was fond of exaggeratory declamation, which he employed to adorn and invigorate his prejudices.

As Rasselas is a series of adventures and histories which all terminate in the same doleful manner, it would be idle to select any other entire narrative. But some passages afford room for remark, from which a few shall be selected for my present purpose.

It has been related, that Johnson experienced some infelicity in matrimony, and this has, in general, been the cause assigned

assigned (though, I think, without foundation) for his known acrimony, in speaking of this state, or its preceeding one of courtship. But whatever may have been the cause, it is not my purpose to enquire. In Rasselas, he considers it as universally wretched, and celibacy as no less so. Nekayah, in her search of happiness, enters the domestic habitation, and finds discord every where prevailing. She meets neither with filial duty, nor parental affection; with fraternal harmony, nor conjugal bliss. She is every where surprized with the dissentions which exist, as well beneath the thatched cottage, as the stately dome of domestic splendour. Distress may be frequent, but it cannot be universal, except in an universal calamity. In the horrors of a famine, or a plague, every one will be found equally wretched, for every one will be in equal danger; but in a country at peace, and labouring neither under the influence of a pestilence nor a famine, it must be occasional and rare; and, I hope, for the honour of human nature, that domestic discord is less prevalent

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than Dr. Johnson would persuade us. But, I believe, the experience of every man is adequate to its confutation.

The miseries of celibacy are thus pourtrayed by our author:

"They dream away their time without friendship, without fondness, and are driven to rid themselves of the days for which they have no use, by childish amusements or vicious delights. They act as beings under the constant sense of some known inferiority, that fills their minds with rancour, and their tongues with censure. They are peevish at home, and malevolent abroad; and, as the outlaws of human nature, make it their business and their pleasure to disturb that society which debars them from its privileges."

This description, I believe, to be just, for a deviation from the express law of Heaven, and from the common course and incitements of nature, cannot be attended with pleasure. A regard for my country and for mankind, render me a friend to marriage. The cohabitation of the sexes constitute part of the duty we

owe

owe to our Creator. As we were formed for each other, so separated our existence must be miserable. Let us reflect how unsociable a being man would be, were he deprived, for a certain period, of all intercourse with woman. Desire to please, to captivate, and to emulate his species, would become extinct in him. In the midst of his fellow creatures, he would be alone: the evening would be as the morning, and the morning as the evening—all to him dark, gloomy, and comfortless: he would retire to rest, to sleep his cares away, and wish to sleep for ever; he would wake but to imbibe a still stronger hatred of life. He would in time learn to suppress every finer feeling, sentiment, and sensation, which inclined towards that sex from which he was debarred, and he would contract a final and determined hatred of his species.

These are the evils to be dreaded from a total separation, and these, in a less degree, are to be dreaded from voluntary seclusion, or celibacy; and surely to discountenance marriage by misrepresentations

tions is, in reality, to become the advocate of the other. Johnson, perhaps, imbibed these sentiments from a celebrated author, whose life he wrote at an early age. This gentleman thus delivers himself on this delicate subject.

"The whole world was made for man, but the twelfth part of man for woman: man is the whole world and the breath of God; woman the rib and crooked piece of man. I could be content that we might procreate like trees without conjunction, or that there were any way to perpetuate the world without this trivial and vulgar way of coition; it is the foolishest act a wise man commits in all his life, nor is there any thing that will more deject his cooled imagination, when he shall consider what an odd and unworthy piece of folly he hath committed*."

The reader will, perhaps, learn with surprize,

* Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, *edit.* 1678, *p.* 160. The *Christian morals* of this author was re-published with a life, by Johnson. This work is valuable; but is written in a certain quaint style, and an affected use of unintelligible words; and there is a strong presumption that an early acquaintance with this book first vitiated Johnson's language.

surprize, that this rebel to matrimony was, however, married after this declaration; and what is no less remarkable, had a numerous offspring. It may, however, be reasonably supposed, that he drew upon himself by this act, the ridicule of contemporary wits, who were glad to behold him in that state he had so much depreciated; and this was, in fact, the case. But to return to my subject.

Johnson has treated marriage with great severity and with little judgment. He decides against it in every shape, and he intimates no situation wherein it is laudable. Early and late marriages, he demonstrates to be equally unhappy, and the preference is given to neither, which, however, was requisite; for in his own words, "both conditions may be bad, but they cannot both be worst." This is a striking example of his unwillingness to confess, that any condition of life is happy; and rather than ingenuously determine, according to the dictates of his own heart (which were, in this instance probably contrary to his writings) he chose to leave the reader in suspense; and to let him

conjecture

conjecture according to his own sentiments. One state must be preferable to another, and it is the duty of the moralist to determine, from an impartial estimate, which is to be preferred; though in this case, mankind does not stand much in need of the decisions of Johnson, or other severe casuists; for, as they obey the dictates of Nature, so they act right; and all disquisitions respecting the propriety or impropriety of marriage, are idle and ridiculous, and can answer no other purpose than to perplex the ignorant with subtleties, or to amuse the learned with elegance of language and poignancy of wit.

Johnson inviduously describes the causes which produce early marriages, and betrays more ill nature than wit; and more ignorance than knowledge. "A youth or maiden," says he, "meeting by chance, or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, go home and dream of one another. Having little to divert attention, or diversify thought, they find themselves uneasy when they are apart; and therefore

fore, conclude, that they shall be happy together. They marry and discover what nothing but voluntary blindness before had concealed; they wear out life in altercations, and charge nature with cruelty." This is depriving mankind of all reasonable motives of choice, and reducing them to the impulse of instinct; it is degrading the ardour of affection and the warmth of youthful love to the blind power of mechanism. Perhaps Johnson in this instance, thought what he wrote; and if this be true, he certainly wrote nonsense. But that he was capable of the true absurd, the following sage axiom will demonstrate. Rasselas wishing to reclaim some licentious youths with whom he had connected himself, harangues them in the most eloquent manner, and tells them with infinite gravity, that "*he that never thinks can never be wise!!*" This is certainly nothing at all, or at least nothing to the purpose. Other such asburdities might be produced from his writings were it necessary; but as a selection would answer no end, I shall not waste the time of my reader, by such an employment.

I shall quote only one more passage from this work. I have already observed how much, and how frequently, Johnson has laboured to depict the infelicities of old age. Whence this originated it cannot now perhaps be known; but surely if he really believed what he has written, he must have been wretched to a degree, when he beheld himself verging towards that unhappy state. But this may be justly suspected, for he could hardly be so blind to every thing around him as not to see that even decrepitude had its pleasures. The want of novelty in those who have outlived its charms is compensated by the pleasures of reflection, and those who can no longer taste the enjoyments of the objects immediately surrounding them, may indulge the soft melancholy of reminiscence and animate those scenes into temporary existence which have for ever passed. The man of years must possess some stock of knowledge, some association of ideas, more or less pleasing, which are unknown to the juvenile mind. These cannot be wholly without delight, and they may,

may, perhaps, occasionally be combined with other objects of gratification, which are altogether new or pleasing from some relative connection. Here is a source of pleasure always within our possession, and which may be infinitely varied; for the world is not uniform, nor so confined in its products, as that the life of man is adequate to a just observation of them all.

For the contemplative mind there is abundant food in nature and in man, to the latest hour of existence; and those whose desires are merely sensual, will find sufficient objects of gratification in the progressive improvements of mankind, and the petty inventions of the artificers of pleasure. To suppose that old age is a state of misery, without alleviation or without hope, is fantastically ridiculous, and unworthy a man who would be thought conversant in the knowledge of nature; for it might, with equal justice, be affirmed, that manhood is wretched, because we are no longer delighted with toys, or the inactivity of infancy. Johnson has represented this stage of life as totally

totally incapable of any kind of enjoyment, and as dead to every sensation but the calls of nature. Rasselas is desirous to enquire of a sage, whom he chances to meet, whether "youth alone is to struggle with vexation, and whether any better hope remains for the latter part of life." They accost him, and the following dialogue ensues.

"Sir," said the Princess, "an evening walk must give to a man of learning like you, pleasures which ignorance and youth can hardly conceive. You know the qualities and causes of all that you behold; the laws by which the river flows; the periods in which the planets perform their revolutions. Every thing must supply you with contemplation, and renew the consciousness of your own dignity."

"Lady," answered he, "let the gay and the vigorous expect pleasure in their excurtions; it is enough that age can obtain ease. To me, the world has lost its novelty: I look round and see what I remember to have seen in happier days. I rest against a tree, and consider that

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in the same shade, I once disputed upon the annual overflow of the Nile, with a friend who is now silent in the grave. I cast my eyes upwards, fix them on the changing moon, and think with pain on the vicissitudes of life. I have ceased to take much delight in physical truth; for what have I to do with those things which I am soon to leave?"

"You may, at least, recreate yourself," said Imlac, "with the recollection of an honourable and useful life, and enjoy the praise which all agree to give you."

"Praise," said the sage, with a sigh, "is to an old man an empty sound, I have neither mother to be delighted with the reputation of a son, nor wife to partake the honours of her husband*. I have outlived my friends and my rivals. Nothing is now of much importance; for I cannot extend my interest beyond myself. Youth is delighted with applause, because it is considered as the earnest of some future good, and because the

* This passage involuntarily awakens the sigh of sympathy, when we reflect upon the author's condition at the time of his writing it.

the prospect of life is far extended: but to me who am now declining to decrepitude, there is little to be feared from the malevolence of men, and yet less to be hoped from their affection or esteem. Something they may yet take away, but they can give me nothing. Riches would now be useless, and high employment would be pain.——My retrospect of life recals to my view many opportunities of good neglected: much time squandered upon trifles, and more lost in idleness and vacancy. I leave many great designs unattempted, and many great attempts unfinished. My mind is burdened with no heavy crime, and therefore I compose myself to tranquillity; endeavour to abstract my thoughts from hopes and cares, which, though reason knows them to be vain, still try to keep their old possession of the heart; expect, with serene humility, that hour which nature cannot long delay; and hope to possess in a better state that happiness which here I cannot find, and that virtue which here I have not attained."

This I believe to be a true picture of Johnson's

Johnson's mind, at the time he wrote it. The recent death of his mother must have sensibly affected him, and he was not of a temper to oppose the inroads of melancholy. The decease of many of his friends too, about this time, may be supposed to add to his natural depression; and to these conjunct circumstances we probably owe this false, but beautiful picture of human nature. It is penned with a certain awful grandeur, which seizes upon the mind, and the whole passage is written in such an exquisite manner, and with such simplicity of language, that we almost forget its faults in admiring its beauties. Such power has eloquence over the affections, that it can even adorn falsehood, and lead us insensibly into error, unless we resist its power with magnanimity, and turn from its wiles with disgust.

From this consideration of Rasselas, it will be obvious to every reader, how prejudicial it must be to the minds of youth. It is painful to consider how much the genius of Johnson was degraded, in composing a series of fictious incidents,

incidents, that might afford amusement for an idle hour, to those whose judgment could not be perverted. But it is likely to have another effect, and that more fatal; it is calculated to vitiate the principles of the ignorant, and the young; and as these may be said to compose by far the greater part of society, it is hence calculated to do much injury which can never be repaired. Youth is generally taught to respect age and wisdom, and to regard their dictates as sacred; this, though a stupid custom, is however a prevalent one, and we are therefore to consider the effects likely to be produced by any thing on society as *it is*, not as it *ought to be*. He who shall be taught to trust in the wisdom of Johnson, will obey the precepts of prejudice and falsehood; he will form opinions that can never be realized, and expect events which are not in nature: he will expect deceit and fraud where there is honesty and candour; he will be caressed and honoured, where he thought to be repulsed and despised; he will meet with gratitude and affection, where he looked

looked for villainy and reproach; he will find friendship where he expected perfidy, and love instead of hatred. In short, he will find man just and equitable, and capable of generous sentiments, and generous actions; and not as Johnson represents him, a mass of fraud, malevolence, and deceit; burning with all the malignity of envy, and all the acrimony of revenge; for such is the picture of the human heart, as exhibited by this gloomy moralist, and as such, it is dishonourable to his genius, and to his memory. I do not hesitate to declare, that, considered in a certain point of view, his writings are more calculated to injure than benefit society, and ought to be sedulously withheld from the early perusal of inquisitive and candid youth*.

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* "It is to be apprehended that ingenious youth of ardent enterprise, yet of refined sensibility, might retire from the perusal of Johnson's moral Essays, with a disgust of life and a contempt for its pursuits, with an understanding perverted by the dazzling beauties of Johnsonian rhetoric, and his imagination tainted with the sympathetic melancholy of the author's style:

—"Oh!

The train of my disquisition has at length brought me to the Idler, a work by far more pleasing and less exceptionable than the Rambler. Johnson here in conformity to his cognomen seems to have dropped his usual severity, and to have sought to imitate the easy vivacity and agreeable variety of Addison; but compared with his great master, his wit is without ease, and his laughter without gaiety. Grave humour was not Johnson's talent; he was formed rather to instruct than to please. When he abandons for a moment his sententious gravity, it is marked with an awkwardness which shews the transition to be violent, and if his jocularity infects us, it is rather that we are surprized than that we are really delighted. He was too pompous to be easy, and too violent to be amusing: What he says, he says with confidence; but his confidence often betrays him into dogmatism; and notwith-

—"Oh! if this were seen,
The happiest youth, viewing the progress thro'
What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
Would shut the book and sit him down to die."

HENRY IV.

Brit. Mag. ut supra.

notwithstanding the affected carelessness and ease of the Idler, it is very easy to trace the *mighty master's* hand beneath the veil.

The contributions to the Idler were more numerous than to the Rambler; yet still they were but few. Johnson had indeed learned somewhat to soften the rigidity of his introductory paper, and to court with some degree of earnestness the support of his contemporaries. This was a request he did not condescend to make in his Rambler; but pretended to disdain all help as needless, being conscious of his own capability; and perhaps secretly supposing that the request would be unnecessary, as the wits of the day would be anxious to have their productions by the side of his. But experience taught him the contrary; he was convinced that merit was confined to a very small circle, and that the confidence or the vanity of authors, are generally sufficient to resist obtrusion where they are not solicited. A consciousness of this therefore probably induced him to beg that support for his Idler,

Idler, which he would gladly have received for his Rambler;—the consequence is obvious.

The Idler does not offer much for remark. Its general character is fidelity and ease. It contains few of those blemishes which obscure the Rambler, and is thus far more valuable; but at the same time, it contains as few of its sublimities. There are not many laborious speculations or moral enquiries, which would indeed be incompatible with the assumed character, which is admirably supported throughout the whole. The Idler has been styled by one of his biographers, the Odyssey after the Iliad. This definition is not, perhaps, very exact; but it is expressive, and I am not inclined to detect the impropriety.

Johnson's reflections on life in this work are more natural than in his Rambler. He seems less inclined to querulous exaggeration, and less attached to the enlargement of mournful truths; he even tells us in one of the papers, that we shall find each day possessed of its pleasures and its joys; a declaration not

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to be found, I believe, in all the Ramblers. He had, perhaps, seen his folly when it was too late to retract; or it might be owing to a concurrence of slight causes not now known, but which will often operate very visibly on the intellect. Whatever the reason may have been, it is very certain, that Johnson displays in the Idler more candour in his delineations, and more veracity in his assertions than he commonly did; and he has certainly more impartially estimated the motives and consequences of human action, and their moral rectitude and obliquity. But this I shall no longer insist upon here. It must be sufficiently known to those who have read the Idler; and to those who have not, the remarks will be unnecessary. I shall therefore commence my observations upon it, and pursue them with what brevity I may find convenient.

Johnson's love of singularity has betrayed him into a contradiction of himself, which it is of importance to note, as it may be the source of error. It is a certain truth, that of literary minds, some are more vigorous in winter, others

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in spring; some are active only in the morning, others in the gloom and silence of night. That this is frequently the case is acknowledged, and it is of little importance whether it be owing to habit or nature. It is well known that Milton's genius flowed only from the autumnal to the vernal equinox, and that Gray could compose only at stated times. It is remarkable that this supposed necessity has been ridiculed by Johnson, after he had declared that it frequently happened, and had even endeavoured to prove why it happened. For the amusement of my reader I shall quote the passages.

"To men of study and imagination, the winter is generally the chief time of labour. Gloom and silence produce composure of mind and concentration of ideas; and the privation of external pleasure naturally causes an effort to find entertainment within. This is the time in which those whom literature enables to find amusements for themselves, have more than common convictions of their own happiness. When they are condemned by the elements to retirement, and debarred

debarred from most of the diversions which are called in to assist the flight of time, they can find new subjects of enquiry, and preserve themselves from that weariness which hangs always flagging upon the vacant mind."—*Rambler.*

"If men who have given up themselves to fanciful credulity, would confine their conceits in their own minds, they might regulate their lives by the barometer with inconvenience only to themselves; but to fill the world with accounts of intellects subject to ebb and flow; of one genius that awakened in the spring, and another that ripened in the autumn; of one mind, expanded in the summer, and of another concentrated in the winter, is no less dangerous than to tell children of bugbears and goblins."—*Idler.*

Here Johnson manifestly contradicts himself, and shews either the weakness of opinion, or the folly of eccentricity. The latter is probably the cause; for had he been convinced of any impropriety, I am persuaded his integrity would have prompted either to a public disavowal or to a secret erasure in some subsequent edition of

of the Rambler; but hurried away by the impetuosity of his passions, he fell into an error, of which he was hardly guilty. But candour will still find it difficult to reconcile the contrariety; for in his Life of Milton and of Gray, he again censures it after a lapse of near twenty years. We must, therefore, quietly suppose, that distracted between truth and prejudice, and, perhaps, shame, he imposed upon himself in the tumult of contending passions, and wrote otherwise than he really believed*.

Johnson was not a very accurate logician; he was too fond of paradox to be perspicuous, and too vehement to persuade. But he was ambitious of universal ability, and often precipitated himself into enquiries which he was incompetent to decide. In number twenty-four he has attempted to prove the very great novelty that there *are times* when a man *does*

* To add to the *mighty contradiction* we find him at a period subsequent to the publication of his Idler, and previous to that of his Lives, declaring that, "Between Easter and Whitsuntide, having always considered that time as propitious to study, I attempted to learn the Low Dutch Language." *Meditations, p.* 123.—This is indeed "*Confusion worse confounded.*"

does not think beside the *hours of sleep.* He denies the division of life into active and contemplative, and asserts it to be inadequate and fallacious. " There are mortals," says he, " whose life is certainly not active, for they do neither good nor evil, and whose life cannot be called contemplative, for they never attend either to the conduct of men or the works of nature, but rise in the morning, look round them till night in careless stupidity, go to bed and sleep, and rise again in the morning."

The activity of life has never been thought purely to consist in the performance of good and evil; for how many rise in the world like meteors, exist a while, then fade away, and are as if they had never been. To be either virtuous or wicked in an eminent degree, is not the lot of every man; and yet none can live without performing good either directly or indirectly, for such is the condition of humanity. The most cankered villain, or the most stupid fool that ever disgraced the world, could not avoid dispensing benefits in their circle

of activity, though they were not, perhaps, the immediate result of philanthropy or principle. As man is a relative being, he is compelled either from the nature of society, or the legal institutions of his country, to the performance of a certain species of moral good, which he cannot deviate from without incurring in most cases a proportionate danger or punishment. Though this may, perhaps, be deemed a negative virtue, it is, however, a sufficient argument to demonstrate the activity of man, and that no human being who shall possess all or even a part of his perceptions and faculties can possibly exist in a state of inactivity. Equally impossible is it for the mind to rest in a state of ideal vacancy, or total suspension of intellect. To contemplate the works of nature or the conduct of man, is the employment of philosophers, the extent of whose minds enable them to trace consequences in their causes; to detect with rapidity the multifarious involutions of human passion; to mark the concatenation of society from moral to political, and from political to moral; to comprise

comprise the chain of nature, from her highest excellence to her lowest degradation; to trace moral good proceeding from physical evil; to mark distinct features and general resemblances; minute deviations and invariable properties; and, in short,

"To look thro' nature up to nature's God."

POPE.

But it is hence very certain that all men cannot be philosophers. The business of the world must be performed, and without the assistance of such exalted geniuses. Those who minister to the wants of others or themselves, those who invent supplies for artificial necessities, and those who labour for improvement or elegance must all find subjects for intellectual employment. Every art, whether necessary or superfluous, employs a certain number of individuals, and many subordinate hands; which are again multiplied by indolence or by fraud. These then cannot be denied to have something on which to *contemplate*; and those whom fortune has placed beyond the necessity of

of manual industry, seek objects of contemplation in the boundless variety of pleasure, and solace their hours with the sports of the field, the tumult and hurry of the town, the bustle of a military life, the more retired labours of study, or in the supporting some prevalent or fashionable foible. It is therefore evident, that these cannot be deemed guilty of that intellectual vacancy; and these may be said to comprise the " maiden aunts with small fortunes, the younger brothers that live upon annuities, the traders retried from business, the soldiers absent from their regiments, and the widows that have no children;" which Johnson considers as having no activity, no thought, but are mere breathing puppets.

As a confutation of the celebrated question in logic, " whether man always thinks," he proposes the following fallacious argument.

" If it be impossible to think without materials, there must necessarily be minds that do not always think; and whence shall we furnish materials for the meditation of the glutton between his meals, of the

the sportsman in a rainy month, of the annuitant between the days of quarterly payment, of the politician when the mails are detained by contrary winds."

To this idle and nugatory question, it will be sufficient to say, that every thing that is, furnishes materials of thinking to a rational being.

Johnson possessed the rare power of treating the most common things in the most uncommon manner. This is frequently observable in his Rambler, where he indulges himself in speculations on subjects which have been successively the objects of the Tatler, the Guardian, and the Spectator; yet in his hands they wear an appearance altogether new. He was certainly in no need of borrowing reflections; for the energy of his mind and the magnitude of his ideas were generally adequate to any task which he might impose upon himself.

In Numbers 22 and 38, he offers some observations on the cruelty and impolicy of imprisoning for debt. He shews by many cogent arguments, that it militates, in a high degree, against the interest of

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the country, and that it is a disgrace to the legislature. The great benevolence and piety of Johnson's mind, though not great beyond imitation, as his female biographer asserts, will always reflect upon his memory a more enviable honour than all the fame which his works have procured him. In his writings, expressly calculated to redress any grievance, there is a manly sensibility which irresistibly seizes the affections, and a virtuous indignation which impresses us with awe. He never seems so vigorously to exert himself as on such occasions, and then the thunder of his voice is heard with reverence and admiration.

The reasonings of our author on this subject are powerful and conclusive. The laws of England are severe, and frequently most cruel; and though they have been much vaunted by Englishmen, foreigners who shall attentively consider them, must, and I believe have, generally condemned them as sanguinary. What equity is that which subjects the life and liberty of one man to the malignity and caprice of another? If this cannot in the pre-

sent

sent constitution of our country be dispensed with, (which is doubtful) why is it not limited to peculiar circumstances, and vested in the hands of an individual only as he shall be deemed legally authorised to use it? Indiscriminate power will always be attended with much danger and abuse. The most callous villain, instigated by brutal malice or wanton caprice, may incarcerate in the damps and gloom of a dungeon the unsuspecting youth whom he has lured into his power. This is a circumstance never enquired into; if a debt be proved, it is never asked how it was contracted; whether by the solicitations of the creditor, or by his menaces to arrest for some debt already existing. Yet both these arts are frequently practised by the fraudulent trader solely with the sordid view of gain. Overcome by the insidious allurements, or by the barbarous threats, of this designing wretch, the trembling delinquent is often subdued by temptation which is unlawfully exerted, or hurried by fear, which the brutality of his persecutor excites. It is very certain that this

this is frequently the case; and it ought therefore to form some part of consideration in a legal process.

The miseries of a jail are also a stain on the country, which ought to be wiped off. It is notorious how many die yearly from the nauseous filth, the foul and stagnated air, the infection of epidemic diseases, or the barbarism of the superintendants of these dreadful abodes. But the masterly pen of Johnson will better depict the horrors of these receptacles, and to say that they are eternal monuments of disgrace to the country is saying little.

" The miseries of jails is not half their evil; they are filled with every corruption which poverty and wickedness can generate between them; with all the shameless and profligate enormities that can be produced by the impudence of ignominy, the rage of want, and the malignity of despair. In a prison, the awe of the public eye is lost, and the power of the law is spent; there are few fears, there are no blushes. The lewd inflame the lewd, the audacious harden

harden the audacious. Every one fortifies himself as he can, against his own sensibility; endeavours to practise on others the arts which are practised on himself, and gains the kindness of his associates, by a similitude of manners.

" Thus, some sink amidst their misery, and others survive, only to propagate villainy. It may be hoped that our lawgivers will at length take away from us this power of starving and depraving one another; but if there be any reason why this inveterate evil should not be removed in our age, which true policy has enlightened beyond any former time, let those whose writings form the opinions and the practices of their contemporaries, endeavour to transfer the reproach of such imprisonment from the debtor to the creditor, till universal infamy shall pursue the wretch, whose wantonness of power, or revenge of disappointment, condemns another to torture and to ruin; till he shall be hunted through the world as an enemy to man, and find in riches no shelter from contempt."

Such are the arguments of Johnson, and

and as such they stand in need of no defence. Every bosom must confess their truth and every heart swell with wishes for their practice. But it is not often the case that those who are exalted to power are willing to listen to the dictates of wisdom.—Yet while the English legislature boasts the names of Kenyon, and Erskine, what may we not be allowed to hope?

The conclusion of this noble and animated essay is worthy of transcription. It is the gentle offspring of a mind at ease, and of a conscience unstained with crime. It is at once an honour to the head and heart of Johnson.

"Surely he whose debtor has perished in prison, though he may acquit himself of deliberate murder, must at least have his mind clouded with discontent, when he considers how much another has suffered from him; when he thinks on the wife bewailing her husband, or the children begging the bread which their father would have earned. If there are any made so obdurate, by avarice or cruelty, as to revolve these consequences without

without dread or pity, I must leave them to be awakened by some other power, for I write only to human beings."

No. 41, of the Idler, is a fine effusion of tender and virtuous melancholy, not sinking beneath the oppression of grief, but calmly regarding its empire, and submissively referring it to the will of omnipotence. It was probably written under the influence of his mother's death, which happened about this time. He says, "the life which made my own life pleasant is at an end, and the gates of death are shut upon my prospects."

There is an expressive sensibility in the following quotation, which no heart can resist, which is not totally dead to the whispers of sympathy. It is indeed little more than an amplification of Young's line: "When such friends part, 'tis the survivor dies;" but it is, I think, more affecting than Young, for it is more artless and simple.

"The loss of a friend upon whom the heart was fixed, to whom every wish and endeavour tended, is a state of dreary desolation, in which the mind looks abroad,

abroad, impatient of itself, and finds nothing but emptiness and horror. The blameless life, the artless tenderness, the pious simplicity, the modest resignation, the patient sickness, and the quiet death, are remembered only to add value to the loss, to aggravate regret for what cannot be amended, to deepen sorrow for what cannot be recalled."

It was not always in the power of Johnson to prevent himself from being ridiculous. In his eighty eighth paper he is eminently so; when he supposes that Englishmen expected from the congregation of philosophers who formed themselves into the Royal Society, that the gout and stone would not be painful, that unploughed ground would yield harvest, or that hawthorns would bring forth either oranges or grapes. They certainly looked for improvement in the arts of life from their endeavours; but they were never stupid enough to suppose that the course of nature would be altered by them. This ignorance has been conceded to them by Johnson.

Any further circumstantial observations upon

upon the Idler will be needless. I shall only point out one error in it, which our author has committed from the before-mentioned desire of universal ability. In his 32d Paper he says, that of sleep "no search has yet found either the efficient or the final cause; or can tell what benefits the animal receives from this alternate suspension of its active powers."

The efficient cause of sleep is, I believe, yet unknown, or at least, much disputed, and at best, but doubtful. But the *final* cause is acknowledged to be the application of nourishment to the decayed parts; to recruit the blood; perfect the secretions, &c. All animal bodies, by the attraction of surrounding substances, and by an active principle within, are continually throwing off superfluous decayed parts, to supply which, nature has ordained the alternate periods of labour and rest, of sleeping and waking.

The Idler is, upon the whole, a more entertaining work than the Rambler; for it embraces greater variety of subjects; the leading idea is more original, the thoughts

thoughts are more natural, and the language more easy. But yet it is not to be preferred to the Rambler; for it is certainly a less valuable performance. The latter contains less amusement, but far more instruction than the former; and in estimating moral works, that which more directly appeals to the heart, and corrects the passions, is, in reality, more valuable.—I have already said, that the Rambler only requires a judicious correction of some parts, and expulsion of others, to be rendered the most inestimable book which the English language can boast.

These Remarks have been written with that freedom which the author regards as necessary in moral enquiries. He feels that he has committed no injury to the great name of Johnson, and therefore submits them to the public without hesitation. They may perhaps afford a temporary amusement to those whose hours are vacant, and who are willing to content themselves with inferior merit. They can have no injurious effect: they may promote the cause of truth, but can never hurt

hurt it. Yet he is prepared to meet some censure; for those who lie under the influence of public opinion will regard him as audacious, and those who are too idle to investigate truth will think him a trfler. Perhaps he may be both; of that, however, he is no proper judge. But whatever fate may attend it, his own internal consciousness will support him. He equally disdains to avoid censure by flattery, or to court it by pretended indifference. He dismisses it with tranquility, to stand by its own merit, or to fall by the condemnation of those who are capable of judging. He shall only say, that whatever may be its doom, whether it be decried as dull, as trifling, or as useless, he is little anxious; while he can assure himself that his motives were virtuous, and that he gratified no illaudable passion or desire.

DIALOGUES

OF

THE DEAD.

BOZ and *POZ*

IN

THE SHADES.

APPENDIX.

AFTER a few of the foregoing Essays had appeared in the Columns of the Porcupine, a Journal, celebrated for its moral purity and political independence, I was aware, in consequence of the answers to Correspondents, inserted in that Paper, that a serious controversy would arise. The firm partizans of Johnson announced their intention of combatting my arguments, and some Essays in justification of that celebrated writer had already been committed to the Press, when the singular and unexpected change in the principles of the Porcupine, and its subsequent incongruous junction with another Journal, induced many of its admirers (myself among the rest) to decline their future contributions. One article however, of a satyrical nature, which was sent for insertion, but did not appear in print, I have added to this Treatise by way of appendix; the following note will explain how the manuscript came into my possession.

To

To ATTALUS.

" SIR,

" HAVING been informed of your intention to publish the interesting Essays with which you lately favoured me, in the form of a Pamphlet, I take this opportunity of forwarding, for your perusal, a curious MS. which I received from an anonymous Correspondent, in the month of October last. It was intended for insertion, but owing to the occurrence of some unforeseen circumstances it was mislaid, and not recovered till a change had taken place in the property of our Paper. The MS. was then left at the office for the author, (according to his request) but not having been demanded, there can be no objection to your publishing it, if you think proper, as an appendix to your Tract. As a *Jeu d' Esprit*, it will immediately be understood, and doubtless relished by the readers of Boswell's " Life of Johnson."

" I am, SIR,

" Your very humble Servant,

——— ———,

Southampton Street,
Dec. 31, 1801.

" Editor of the Porcupine."

DIALOGUE

BETWEEN

BOSWELL and *JOHNSON*,

IN THE SHADES.

[*As they meet*, Poz, *after an indignant scowl, turns from* Boz, *and unwieldily endeavours to run away from him.* Boz *pursues, and soon overtakes him.*]

Boz. WHY, my dear Doctor, surely you do not know me again, or I can hardly imagine you would shun me so eagerly.

Poz. Why, Sir, I *did* know you, and *therefore* avoided you.

Boz. Rather than believe this, may I not be indulged in supposing that you were thinking of the meeting between Ajax and Ulysses in the shades, as it is described in the Odyssey; and that——

Poz. Sir, whatever of Ajax you may find in me, I can discover in you nothing of Ulysses.

Boz. Yes, Sir; as I have overtaken you so readily, you will grant, at least, that I resemble him in swiftness of foot?

Poz.

Poz. Why yes, Sir;—but remember, that of all the parts of the body, the *feet* and the *head* are the widest asunder.

Boz. I see, Sir, that your mind has suffered nothing by the loss of your body; and I am as little able as ever to cope with you in argument.—But may I ask, Sir, to what I am to attribute this unusual flow of spleen against me?—After so long an absence, and give me leave to add, after such indefatigable pains as I have bestowed on your memory, I should have hoped - - - - -

Poz. Peace, blockhead! nor dare pollute my ears with the mention of those two quarto monuments of ignominy, wherein you have embalmed the follies of the hero and historian together.—Those literary demiculverins, with which, under the guise of sounding a salute, you have blown my glory to atoms. Little did I surmise, while I was permitting you familiarly to dangle at my lips, and catch my crudities as they fell, that I was inditing to an Amanuensis, and fulminating posthumous anathemas against myself.

Boz. Stay an instant, my illustrious friend, while I step to one of Rhadamanthus's clerks

clerks for a pen and ink, to take down that last luminous sentence.

Poz. No, Sir. In the first place, you have no longer a hand wherewith to write; and in the next, you might as well have sought for a tree in Scotland, as for a quill in the shades. Were it not for these incorporeal disqualifications, I would not by opening my lips, have hazarded a second assassination from your pen. We should have had you undertaking to chronicle the tattle of Tartarus, and might have expected from you the Biography, or rather Thanatography, of the ghosts.

Boz. [after a pause.] I am half afraid, Sir, to speak what is at my tongue's end.

Poz. Nay, Sir, be bold: you have nothing to dread from the fist of a phantom.

Boz. Why then, Sir, I *would* have said that you have already figured in the other world in a piece with such a title as you mention:—do you remember who wrote "The Ghost?"

Poz. Aye, aye, Parson Churchill:—the dog believed the story though, I have no doubt; but he had satirical reasons for his incredulity: had he accepted the ghost, he must have resigned Pomposo:—he disbelieved for bread and fame.

Boz. That poem, and Lexiphanes, I think, Doctor, were the only very violent attacks of which you had to complain during your life; and, since your death you have fared better than ever.

Poz. No, Sir; worse beyond computation:—I was strenously climbing up the steep of Fame, and when I had nearly gained the summit, you officiously thrust out a helping hand, and struck me to the bottom.

Boz. Why, dear Sir; the "Life" has already galloped through two editions:—never was book so greedily read.

Poz. Sir, who shall doubt it? When is such a crowd assembled as at Tyburn on hanging-day? Had you only told my life, or suppressed the idle or uncourteous parts of my conversation, your work had gone to the trunk-makers. The same throng which is gathered round the gallows by an execution, is dispersed by a reprieve. Sir, when a putrid carcase is envied for the worms it draws, I shall begin to count the editions of your book among my trophies.

Boz. Why, good Sir, what would you have had me do?

Poz.

Poz. Why, foolish Sir, nothing.

Boz. And yet surely, you would not have been content that so much wit and wisdom should have perished for want of one to record them.

Poz. Pray, Sir, when were the nuptials, or the victory, of an Emperor forgotten, because they were not blazoned by the marrow-bone and cleaver?

Boz. Why, Sir, when *I* was married, I remember I was not without some sort of pride and pleasure in this rude, yet honest noise.

Poz. Why, Sir, when a Boswell marries, a butcher may serve to make the rejoicing.—But, Sir, your account is false: you were married in Scotland; and where there is no corn to feed an ox, there is no ox to furnish a marrow-bone, and consequently there needs no cleaver to quarter his joints. Your wedding, therefore was celebrated, if celebrated it was at all, by other music than that of the marrow-bone and cleaver.

Boz. I feel myself much mortified, Sir, at finding you so dissatisfied with my well-meant endeavours to celebrate your name. Had *I* died first, I should have

rejoiced

rejoiced to know that my life would be written by *you*.—May I hope that, in that case, you would have undertaken it?

Poz. No, Sir, I could have told nothing. In the penury of matter, I must have registered your dinners. Besides, Sir, *your* life was *my* life: you existed but in me. It would have been the substance telling the history of the shadow. It would have been as if a Queen should become the biographer of the page who holds her train. Sir, you might as rationally have expected of James Poro, who walked about the world with a torpid head growing from his side, to go to work upon the "life and opinions" of the excrescence.

Boz. And yet, Sir, unless I had been thought of some little consequence, I should hardly have been admitted in your company, as I frequently was, into the houses of great and learned persons:—I was often at Streatham;—at Sir Josh. Reynolds's.

Poz. Sir, you have been answered already. When the substance is let in, there is no being denied to the shadow. Sir, if it be a great man's whim that he will not

not scrape his boots at the door, his friends, rather than want his conversation, will suffer him to drag his dirt into the parlour.

Boz. But, Sir, I have sometimes gone *without you* into respectable company.

Poz. Why, Sir, did you never caress a friends' favourite cur, in order to be able to tell that friend that you *had* caressed him?—

Boz. But I have been sometimes received where I have not been known to be of your acquaintance.

Poz. Why then, Sir, I must leave you to such comfort as you can find in those cases wherein a cur has been caressed for *his own* sake.

Boz. (aside.) There is no escaping him!—Sir, I have not been *myself* since I lost you.

Poz. Why, Sir, if you expect *condolence* upon that score, I am afraid I must think twice before I offer it. I am not very easily able to see how you should be a loser by transmigration.

Boz. I consoled myself for some time by writing your life.

Poz. Why then, Sir, you preserved your identity

identity longer than you are willing to suppose :—you were quite *yourself* during that employment.—and what is your story after the publication ?

Boz. Sir, I—I—I, Sir ?

Poz. Why, Sir, the question is, in truth, scarcely worth repetition ; for I enquired what befel you, after the life was given to the public.

Boz. Sir, I—I—I can't say but——though to be sure——not that——

Poz. How is all this, Sir ? What disjointed hesitations, what uncategorical tortuosities are these ?

Boz. Why, Sir, it was not very long after the life was published that I died.

Poz. Well, Sir, and, if I may hazard a new question without exciting new perturbation, of what did you die ?

Boz. [in the utmost confusion.] Why, Sir, I—I—you—you—I hardly—you know we are all mortal ;—some die of consumptions, some of fevers, some of—

Poz. [in his most tremendous tone.] Sir, am I to be told, at this time, that when a man dies, he owes his death to *something ?*—Once more, Sir, of what did *you* die ?

Boz. Dear Sir, you are so——I——of what

what did I die? Why, Sir; I died of—of—of—of *mahogany*.

Poz. [after an awful pause.] Of *what*, Sir?

Boz. Of mahogany, Sir.

Poz. [after a still longer pause.] Why, Sir, I believe I begin to comprehend this coy reluctance in revealing the history of your demise.—You died of mahogany: i. e. as I incline to interpret it, you fell by a chair or table hurled at you by some new victim to your biographical mania.

Boz. No, Sir, indeed.

Poz. Why then, Sir, let us have no more of this oracular ambiguity. Let us, for once, invert our situations: be you the teacher, and let me be the scholar. According to what mode or meaning did you find mahogany mortal?

Boz. From its intoxicating effects on those who drink it.

Poz. How, Sir! again stealing behind the mask.

Boz. Indeed, Sir, I did not intend.—

Poz. Why then, Sir, tamper no longer with my impatience; but inform me, forthwith, how long wood has been potable.—

able—by what metamorphosis wrought on this wonderful body, a man may quaff his furniture?

Boz. Sir, you have misconceived my meaning; mahogany is not, as you suppose, a solid, but a fluid; not a wood, but a liquor. It is a composition of *gin* and *treacle*, which was much commended to me by several of my friends, and I could not refuse them the pleasure they seemed to derive from seeing me drink it.

Poz. What, Sir! and did you sacrifice the happiness of health, and the dignity of man to the importunity of fools, by swallowing a compound that would disgrace the carousals of swine?

Boz. Why, Sir, I thought that as each ingredient was good in a separate state, they could not be bad in union. *Gin*, they told me, was at least wholesome, if not palatable; and what school-boy, they asked, has not licked his lips over a roll and *treacle?* Besides, Sir, as my friends had so highly praised the mixture, and so often had the trouble of preparing it for me, could I have declined it without ingratitude or rudeness?

Poz. Why, Sir, *saponaceous substances* are wholesome,